10 BRILLIANT STORIES

ARGOSY

SEPTEMBER, 1959

Price in SOUTH AFRICA
AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND
TWO SHILLINGS
AND SIXPENCE

JOHN STEINBECK

A Night on Ventotene

H. E. BATES

MICHAEL GILBERT

YOUNGMAN CARTER

HUGH PENTECOST

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

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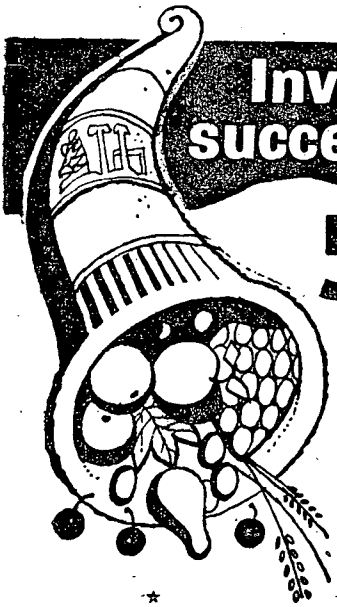

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

Vol. XX CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER, 1959 No. 8

		Page
Log Book	*Illustrations by Graham*	4
Hubbub Bubbles	**Robert Holmes**	7
Mushroom Stew		18
The excerpt from "Cookery Encyclopædia," by permission of Odhams Press; "Field Fare," by courtesy of the author and Museum Press; the poem by George Rostrevor Hamilton by permission of William Heinemann		
Man's Best Friend	**Patricia Highsmith**	19
Nymph Overboard	**Jacques Perret**	31
	Translated by D. H. R. Brearley	
Road to Romany	*Decorations by Susan Einzig*	42
"Gold Earrings," by courtesy of William Heinemann; "Clothes-pegs," from "Collected Poems of John Pudney," by permission of Putnam and Company; the excerpt from "Under Milk Wood," by courtesy of J. M. Dent and Sons; the excerpt from "I Know All This," from "Collected Poems of Vachel Lindsay," by courtesy of The Macmillan Company of America		
Grand Seigneur	**Youngman Carter**	45
The excerpt from "Light on a Dark Horse," by permission of Hollis and Carter		
A Night on Ventotene	**John Steinbeck**	56
Love in a Wych-elm	**H. E. Bates**	67
Love Game	*Decorations by Richard Gaune*	76
The excerpt from "Collected Poems of John Betjeman," by courtesy of John Murray; "Hard Court," by permission of Michael Joseph; the Nancy Mitford excerpt by courtesy of Hamish Hamilton; D. A. Nicholas Jones' poem by permission of Jonathan Cape; the excerpt from "Malice in Wonderland," by courtesy of William Collins, Sons, and Company: "Animal Grab," by permission of Ernest Benn		
Rapid Orbit	**Avram Davidson**	79
From Playboy: Copyright 1959 by H.M.H. Publishing Co., Inc. "Mind's Eye," by Fredric Brown: Copyright 1955 by Fantasy House, Inc.		
Motive for Murder	**Hugh Pentecost**	83
	Illustration by Cosgrove	
Silver Lining	**R. J. J. Theakston**	109
Petrella's Holiday	**Michael Gilbert**	114
© *Mrs. Michael Gilbert 1959*		
Illustration by Ian Garrard		
Argosy Crossword		144

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ARGOSY Log Book

BROWSING through a household magazine lately we were saddened by what is happening to poor old paterfamilias. Thirty years ago, when he got home from the office at five-thirty, he was given a buttered crumpet and a cup of tea, he beat such of his children as deserved it, and generally administered household justice, and he then retired to his sanctum for well-earned repose and improving reading.

Now what do we see? Hardly is he through the door than the Little Woman has handed him his power tool and he is in the thick of it. He is tearing out the banisters and setting in glass panels in order to save the Little Woman five minutes' dusting.

He is replacing the gravel on the front path by round concrete blocks (so much more original than square ones) to save the Little Woman five minutes' weeding. He is covering the towel rail with ribbed plastic so that the Little Woman won't have the labour of picking towels up, should they slide off. He has bought up a quantity of bankrupt stock and is selling three-foot bunnies (the largest toy in the world,) plastic ties (for crying out loud, it'll be plastic razor-blades next,) king-size pandas, and poppet beads, to buy the Little Woman a spin dryer, to save her walking out to the clothes line. Besides this, he is putting every article of furniture on ballbearing castors, to save her getting down on her stomach and cleaning underneath, so that any rash movement in the drawing-room brings on a scene like the Marx brothers on roller skates.

He is covering everything that can be covered—baths, pipes,

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legs, posts, bedrails—and he is stripping everything that can be stripped. In order to save the Little Woman a minimal amount of exertion, this unfortunate fellow is using up his entire leisure and working himself to a skeleton.

And is she proportionately grateful? Does she in return spend energy on his behalf and cook him large, loving meals?

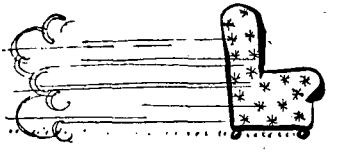
Not a bit of it. She buys him slithery nylon socks and plastic ties, to save ironing and mending; she serves him up unre-dehydrated fish snippets, minute pudding mix, and instant coffee.

Down tools, paterfamilias! *Don't* do it yourself. Back to the sanctum with you, for some improving reading—or better still, read Argosy, which can't be improved on . . .

John Steinbeck is known first and foremost for what has been called the twentieth-century *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—his best-selling book, *The Grapes of Wrath*, outcome of his investigation into conditions among the migratory farm-workers in California. Both as a book and as a film it has travelled all over the world—and it created such strong feelings in California, his native land, that he had to leave on an expedition to the Galapagos Islands till things blew over. It was not his first book; he had been writing for ten years, and had known some pretty lean living, in a little town on the Pacific coast, where he and his wife ate the fish they caught themselves. *Of Mice and Men*, which came out in 1937, made his reputation, and *The Grapes* followed it in 1939.

California is a theme that runs through most of his writing, but occasionally he turns to Europe: *The Moon is Down*, a wartime book, was his powerful message of hope to the occupied countries; his latest novel, *The Short Reign of King Pippin IV* was a light-hearted satire against the French way of life. His dispatches, *Once There Was a War* from which *A Night on Ventotene* is taken, are to be published by William Heinemann.

Hugh Pentecost was born in Massachusetts, and now lives in New England. He sold his first story while he was still in college, and since then has made fiction writing his entire career—apart, he says, from a short stretch on a New York newspaper, and a six-year spell as part owner and editorial writer of a small-town



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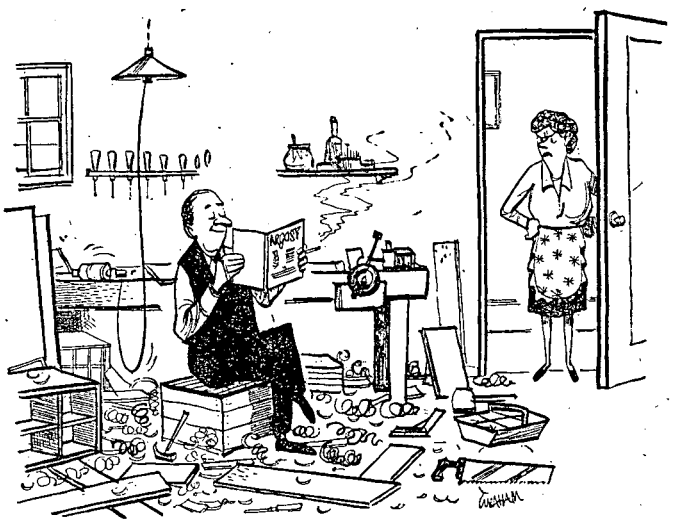
paper. Son of an opera-singer father and actress mother, he spent his boyhood in Europe, where his father sang, and went to school in England, France, and Switzerland. He also writes under the name of Judson Philips—his real name, incidentally.

Robert Holmes has served both in India and Burma (in the Black Watch) and in England (as a member of the Police force.) He is now a journalist, and lives in north London with his wife and two children.

Patricia Highsmith is a Texan, but has lived mostly in and around New York, apart from travels in Europe and Mexico. Alfred Hitchcock pounced on her first book, *Strangers on a Train*, and made it into a movie; it was voted one of the ten best films of 1951. When not writing novels of suspense (her fifth is soon to appear) she pursues a less bloodcurdling occupation: illustrating children's books.

Jacques Perret, winner of the French Prix Interallié in 1951 for fiction, has had one novel translated into English, *The Wind in the Sails*, and has a collection of short stories coming out shortly. Did we say that he was French?

JOHN SILVER



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HUBBUB BUBBLES

Three bald heads shimmered
like the products of some monstrous cuckoo

BY ROBERT HOLMES

WITH bleary-eyed satisfaction, Freddie Pickering stared at the drawing he had just finished. He yawned, and replaced the cap of the Indian ink bottle. Then he slumped in his chair. He felt whacked. The top of his desk was covered with sheets of white cartridge paper—the result of hours of extra toil.

He began shoving the paper into a folder marked: FIRST ROUGHS—HUBBUB SOAP CAMPAIGN.

By rushing the roughs through today, a fortnight early, Freddie hoped to dispel any lingering doubts that old Tumbril might have about him. The L.P. Tumbril Advertising Agency wanted a new general manager. Freddie wanted to be the new general manager. And so—

The agreeable tinkle of cup against saucer broke into Freddie's thoughts. His door opened, and Amybelle came in. He sat up. Amybelle would have made a dying man sit up.

"Coffee, Freddie," she said.

"Delightful," Freddie breathed. And indeed she was. In a clinging, yellow dress and high-heeled shoes, she looked the sort of secretary who could bring ruin to a tycoon. She had a creamy skin, green eyes, and red hair on which the sun never set.

She put his coffee down and stared at him critically. "You look terrible," she said. "What on earth have you been doing?"

"Working," Freddie said. "Just working."

"You look like an old sheepdog with flu."

"I haven't had time to get a haircut."

Amybelle leaned over his desk. "Really, you're impossible! Why don't you go home and rest?"

"Great heavens, I can't do that!" Freddie said. "You know what happens today."

"Today?" She put a scarlet fingernail to her dimpled chin and pondered. "Oh yes—Mr. Biddle is to be appointed general manager today. Well, that's no reason to stay here when—"

"Don't joke about it," Freddie begged. "If that happens I'll cut my throat."

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"Why? Don't you like Mr. Biddle?"

"It's not a question of liking or disliking him. He's a—" Freddie stopped; not because he was lost for words, but because they weren't suitable words to use in front of Amybelle.

Alphonse Biddle was a back-slapper, a nudger and winker, a hearty with an expense-account waistline. His job was to coddle the firm's clients, and he was very good at it. But he was insufferably conceited, in Freddie's view, and knew nothing about the creative side of the business.

"Biddle," Freddie said firmly, "lacks experience."

"You must tell me some time," Amybelle said, "about your experiences. I'd love to hear."

"On the other hand, I've been here all my working life. Starting as a boy—"

"How romantic!" Amybelle said dreamily. "Going to work in a hansom cab—"

"—fifteen years ago," Freddie shouted her down. "My first job was cleaning out the inkpots. Since then I've worked in every department. I know more about—"

"Your coffee's getting cold."

"Biddle hasn't a fraction of my experience. How *can* they make him general manager?"

"You're right, Freddie. I bet Biddle never cleaned an inkpot in his life."

"He couldn't do a job like this, anyway—" Freddie slapped the Hubbub soap folder—"in fact, he couldn't even discuss it intelligently." But Amybelle's attention had wandered.

She stared across the room, and then turned reproachfully. "Freddie, your window's open."

"I know it is," he agreed. "I opened it."

"Well, look what's coming in!"

Freddie looked bewildered. "Sunlight?" he suggested.

"No—*in* the sunlight."

"Motes," he said finally. "You mean those motes of golden dust? Pretty, aren't they?"

"Pretty!" Amybelle closed the window forcefully. "You've had hay fever often enough to recognise pollen by now."

"Well, dammit, who'd expect to see pollen floating about in the middle of London?" Freddie said aggrievedly.

"It's everywhere at this time of the year." Amybelle's mouth pursed and, from long experience, Freddie sensed a humiliating lecture on his health.

He forestalled her by spilling the Hubbub drawings on his desk. "Amybelle, while you're here, I'd like your opinion of this ad. I'm not sure if it's got enough punch."

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She looked at him suspiciously, and then bent over the drawings. They were a series of picture-strips showing how people in all walks of life could find fame, fortune, or romance, by washing with Hubbub soap.

"Well, it's clear enough to me," Amybelle said. "Jenny is a wallflower because of her pimples. The chemist advises her to try Hubbub, and her pimples vanish. The next time she goes dancing all the boys want to partner her. So she picks the best-looking and, a month later, he asks her to marry him—thanks to Hubbub soap."

"You think it rams home the idea as strongly as, say, this one about the rodent exterminator who becomes a film star?"

"Personally," Amybelle said, "I'd *never* use their soap. It makes my skin—"

"Hush," Freddie said, glancing uneasily towards the door. "You know the Hubbub account is about the biggest we have."

"I don't care! If they spent less money on advertising and more on their soap—"

Freddie clapped his hands to his ears. "Don't say things like that! It's heretical." He took his hands away. "What is a girl with those views doing in advertising, anyway?"

"I guess I should have left before it was too late," Amybelle said, looking at him thoughtfully.

It was a cryptic remark, but Freddie was too appalled by her specious reasoning to pay it more than surface attention. He said, "Now listen, Amybelle, it's been proved, time and again, that by stimulating demand for a product it can actually be sold for less. Advertising creates a steady market so that the manufacturer can reduce production costs—"

"—and pass on the benefit to the buying public," Amybelle finished. "Nuts!"

"What?"

"N-U-T-S." She spelt it out.

He glared at her. Amybelle glared back. He wondered fleetingly why it was that all their conversations these days seemed to lead to quarrels. Until a few months ago they had got on well.

Amybelle said, "But don't let me destroy your illusions."

"I have no intention of letting that happen," Freddie said. He began to drink his coffee. It was cold.

He put his cup down with a clatter. Amybelle picked it up.

"Will that be all, Mr. Pickering?"

"No," Freddie snarled. "I want these Hubbub roughs to go down to Mr. Culpippin right away."

"Yes, Mr. Pickering."

"And book me a table for tonight at the Zanzibaba."

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Amybelle hesitated, caught between anger, curiosity, and a nursing instinct that said he should have a warm milk drink and go to bed early. Anger won. "Very well. It's your life." She went sharp-footed to the door.

Freddie watched her balefully. Damn right, it was his life, and he'd organise it the way he pleased—

Two bubbles appeared over Amybelle's shining, red hair. Two opaque, white bubbles that shimmered faintly as though made from the paper of a glossy magazine. Freddie goggled unbelievingly. On each bubble, words were printed in stark, black lettering.

One said, "*thinks* . . . I wonder who he's taking out?" and the other, "*thinks* . . . Why does he never ask me out?"

The door closed behind Amybelle. The bubbles vanished as suddenly as they had appeared.

Freddie rubbed a shaking hand over his eyes.

"Tiredness," he muttered. "Been overdoing things."

The mind played funny tricks when one was tired. After all, he'd been drawing thought-bubbles rising out of heads for years. If he was to suffer from hallucinations, he was much more likely to see bubbles than little green men. It was easily explained, but disconcerting, all the same. Perhaps he ought to stop Amybelle reserving that table? Have an early night for a change?

No, he wouldn't give her that satisfaction. He'd asked her to book it on the spur of the moment, knowing it would upset her. A gesture of independence.

He wondered which of the girls he knew was likely to be available at such short notice. He'd do some telephoning when Amybelle had gone to lunch. Odd, the way he'd read those thoughts into her mind. Amybelle wasn't interested in him . . .

She might have been at one time, but it was too late now.

His telephone rang. Culpippin's secretary was on the line.

"Wants to see me?" Freddie said. "O.K., Miss Hopbun, I'll be right down."

He pulled on his jacket and went to the door. Norbert Culpippin was the general manager—the man Freddie hoped to succeed. Culpippin was going to the agency's New York office. Freddie wondered if this call meant that old Tumbril had reached a decision.

He stopped near Amybelle's desk. "If anyone wants me, I'll be with Mr. Culpippin for a few minutes," he told her.

She looked at him bleakly. "It's not cold today," she said. "Turn your collar down."

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Freddie slammed her office door, very satisfyingly, and headed downstairs. He was on the lower floor when a hand like a haunch of beef thumped between his shoulder-blades.

"What ho, old man," Alphonse Biddle shouted. "How's the shiny pants brigade?"

"Good morning, Biddle."

"Going to see the boss, old man?"

"Yes."

"His last day, what? Incidentally, talking of bosses, old man, I saw the big boss yesterday."

"The big boss?" Freddie said.

"Dear old L.P. Matter of fact it was his idea that we should lunch together, not mine."

Freddie felt his heart sink. If Biddle had really lunched with Tumbril, it could mean only one thing . . .

"Well, mustn't keep you from dear old Culpippin," Biddle was saying. "Tell him I'll pop in later for a little chat."

"What about?"

Biddle roared with laughter. He dug his elbow into Freddie's ribs and winked. "Have a guess, old man," he said merrily. "Have two guesses."

"All right," Freddie said. "I think I know."

Only the Pickering pride enabled him to walk on with head high and shoulders square. Obviously, Culpippin had sent for him in order to break the news of Biddle's appointment. He summoned a small, brave smile for Miss Hopbun and went past her into Culpippin's room.

Culpippin, engrossed in the Hubbub drawings, looked up cheerfully. "Hullo, Freddie. You've done a quick job on these. The old grandstand finish, eh?"

"It was meant to be," Freddie said, sinking glumly into a chair, "but I gather Biddle has pulled the rug from under me."

"Has he?" Culpippin looked startled.

"Didn't he have lunch with Tumbril yesterday?"

"Yesterday, yes. It's your turn today."

Freddie started. "What?"

"Meet him at his club at one o'clock. Two of his co-directors will be there—it's a sort of final test."

"Oh, that's not fair, Norbert—Biddle spends half his life at business lunches, laying on the charm. What kind of impression shall I make after him?"

"You'll be all right. Just be yourself."

"Be myself?" Freddie said bitterly. "The last time I saw Tumbril was at the office party when he came round and handed everyone the Christmas bonus."

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"Ah, the Christmas bonus." Culpippin smiled gently. "Do you know, he's carried out that little ceremony every year for nearly forty years? He's a generous old stick, in his way."

"Generous!" Freddie choked. "You call a new pound note generous?"

"It's the spirit in which it's given that counts."

"Well, listen, Norbert; when he handed over my pound he called me Braithwaite. So what's the point of being myself if he doesn't know who I am?"

"Mustn't let that worry you," Culpippin said easily. "He often calls me Hardcastle."

"But Braithwaite was a copywriter who left twenty years ago," Freddie persisted.

"Hardcastle was a hall porter who died in 1930."

"It's crazy. How can one work for a man like that?"

"I admit the old boy sometimes seems a little out of touch," Culpippin said, "but you must admit he's in remarkable shape for a man of ninety-two."

Freddie sighed. "What about the others—these two co-directors you mentioned?"

"McShay and Tilley-Glanders. They're almost as old and deaf as Tumbril. They'll leave the decision to him. Incidentally, they'll all treat you like a schoolboy."

"Oh, fine," Freddie said. "Marvellous. I look like having a wonderful time."

"Well, I believe Biddle did." Culpippin glanced at his watch. "I suppose you ought to be getting along."

Freddie got up reluctantly. "Did you go through all this once, Norbert?" he asked.

"Oh yes, ten years ago," Culpippin said. "It was the only lunch he's ever bought me."

Freddie shook his head wonderingly and went out. Amybelle had gone to lunch. A faint perfume lingered in her room, and he sniffed sentimentally. Then suddenly, shatteringly, he sneezed.

On his way out he sneezed five times. His eyes began to run. That blasted pollen!

—

When he arrived at Tumbril's club he could barely see. He stumbled blindly up wide steps into a dim, stone-flagged entrance. A porter came towards him, and Freddie explained, between sneezes, that he was Tumbril's guest.

He was led off into the gloom. A figure, hand outstretched, swam forward. Freddie clutched the hand fervently. "Hullo, sir!" he cried, with a warmth he was far from feeling. "It's wonderful to see you again. How are you?"

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" Oh, my usual sciatica, but otherwise very well; very well, indeed," a deep voice replied. " May I take your hat and umbrella, sir? "

" Ah, yes," Freddie said, relinquishing them. He mopped at his eyes. " Blind as a bat. Hay fever."

" Hay fever? " The cloakroom attendant nodded sympathetically. " What you want to do is to take a bit of orange peel—"

" I've tried it," Freddie said. " I've tried everything." He went to the visitors' waiting-room, sat on a late-Victorian couch, and glanced through a late-Victorian magazine.

Ten minutes passed before the porter returned, but Freddie was glad of the respite. His attack of hay fever seemed to be over; already his vision was clearing.

The porter led him up to the lounge, to a nest of leather chairs where three bald heads shimmered in the gloom like the products of some monstrous cuckoo.

" Hullo, sir," Freddie shouted. " It's wonderful to see . . . " Three faces swung towards him, glaring disapprovingly, and his voice tailed away.

Tumbril put down his brandy glass and creaked to his feet. " Heh," he said in a voice that grated like a rusty ratchet, " this is—heh—the feller I was telling yer about, McShay."

McShay—Freddie presumed that it was McShay—said, " Muttering? "

" Pickering," Freddie said.

Tilley-Glanders adjusted his monocle. " Knew a Puttering," he barked, " in the Hoss Guards." He peered up at Freddie. " Not the same chap," he announced.

Tumbril burst into a high-pitched cackle. It was not clear what he was cackling at. " Well, come on, come on," he said. " Let's get at the scoff." He moved towards the restaurant, leaving the others to follow.

The next few minutes were a nightmare for Freddie. The restaurant was fairly full, and the confusion of finding a table made him hot with embarrassment. At one point he began to believe his three companions were playing some mad, old man's version of musical chairs.

And after the confusion of finding a table, the confusion of orders to the waitress in shrill, angry, ancient voices.

" Jugged hare."

" Chicken soup."

" Listen, me girl . . . "

But finally some sort of calm descended.

Tumbril chose the wine, then turned to Freddie. A travesty of a smile disfigured his face. " Now, boy, a ginger pop, eh? "

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"Sir?" Freddie wondered if he was going deaf, too.

"And a bottle of ginger pop," Tumbril said. He turned back to Freddie. "Not often you youngsters get the chance of a good blowout."

"Blowout is right," Freddie said feelingly.

"What?"

"I said you're quite right," Freddie shouted.

"Heh." Tumbril bent over his soup and began to make slobbering noises. He seemed to be having a race with McShay and Tilley-Glanders. Freddie shuddered and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again he found the three old men were watching him over their empty plates. He tried to smile brightly.

Tumbril turned to McShay. "Don't think much of this feller," he said loudly. "No appetite for food—no appetite for work, heh?"

The arrival of the waitress cut short McShay's reply. While there was food on the table the old men were not prepared to waste time talking. Fifteen minutes passed before Tumbril sat back with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Hardcastle tells me yer show promise," he said.

Freddie nodded modestly. He took a cautious sip of his ginger ale and hiccuped.

"What?" Tumbril snapped. "Speak up, young feller!"

"I—I didn't say anything, sir."

"Can't hear a word," McShay said in disgust.

"Hardcastle says yer a bit of an artist," Tumbril said. A cunning gleam flickered in his eyes. "What d'yer think of Picasso, heh?"

Freddie hesitated, wondering if Tumbril really wanted a serious evaluation of Picasso's art or whether there was some catch behind the question. Not that it mattered much, because he was convinced now that his chance was lost. Tumbril had made up his mind in the first five minutes. Then, as he stared at the old man, for the second time that day an unbelievable thing happened. A bubble suddenly appeared above Tumbril's skull.

It said, "*thinks* . . . Can't stand these arty types."

For a hallucination it was shockingly plain, Freddie thought. He glanced swiftly at the others, half convinced that they must share the illusion. And then his eyes bulged in alarm. For they, too, sported bubbles.

McShay's read, "*thinks*. . . . Nasty, watery-eyed, shifty sort of cove . . ." And the one over Tilley-Glanders, "*thinks* . . . Wonder if the feller's a cricketer?"

Freddie took a sustaining gulp of ginger ale. It made him feel sick. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead.

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"Well, dammit," Tumbril said, "can't yer answer a simple question?"

"Picasso?" Freddie said. "I'm afraid I don't know much about his kind of art, sir. I like pictures that sell something."

"Exactly, boy, exactly!" Tumbril appeared immediately mollified. "What I've been saying for sixty years."

At the back of Freddie's already tender nose something stirred. The ginger ale. He whipped out his handkerchief in time to smother a sneeze. He apologised.

"Hay fever—it makes my eyes water so badly," he said to McShay, and then glanced towards Tilley-Glanders. "Must have got it at Lord's last Saturday," he added loudly.

"Hay fever?" said McShay. "You want to get three hairs from a black cat's tail—"

"Lord's?" said Tilley-Glanders. "Did you see Harper fielding at gully—?"

"Refreshin' to meet a young feller with his head screwed on—"

"Any black cat, but not a Manx, of course—"

"Absolutely useless in the slips—"

"When I first saw yer, Braithwaite, I told Hardcastle—"

"Chop 'em up and mix 'em with—"

"Some of these colonials make marvellous fielders—"

Freddie, nodding and smiling like a Chinese shopwalker, felt a scream welling up within him. Grimly he fought it down. And the three old men babbled on and on.

At two-thirty, McShay was describing how an African witch-doctor had cured an uncle of his of beriberi, and Tilley-Glanders was burbling about the Australian M.C.C.'s tour of '09.

Tumbril caught sight of the clock and checked in mid sentence. "Heh," he cried. "Time yer were back at the office, young feller. Can't encourage slackness, heh?"

"Indeed no, sir." Freddie jumped thankfully to his feet. "I was so interested in our conversation, I'm afraid I forgot the time."

Tumbril beamed and shook his hand. McShay and Tilley-Glanders shook his hand. Freddie departed in a glow of good-fellowship. At the door he glanced back.

Tumbril was hunched over the table, his head turned away. But the bubble above it was clearly visible. It said, "*thinks* . . . A better feller than that Widdle feller."

On the way back to his office, Freddie tried again to find an explanation for the bubbles. Tiredness, hallucination, yes—but how was it that he had literally read their thoughts? Subconscious mind-reading, perhaps? That was the only explanation.

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Another idea struck him. If he had read their minds correctly, then what of Amybelle's? Had she thought what he thought she had thought?

He was still wrestling with this involved problem when the taxi stopped outside L.P. Tumbril Advertising. He went in and up to his office. Amybelle stopped typing.

"I thought you were never coming back," she said. "You've been ages."

"I had to lunch with old Tumbril," Freddie said.

"No!" Amybelle rose to her feet. Her face glowed with pleasure. "Freddie, you don't mean . . . ?"

"I think so," Freddie admitted modestly. "I expect Hardcastle—er—Culpippin will let me know as soon as the old man's been in touch with him."

"Freddie, I'm so happy for you," Amybelle said. "I—you've worked terribly hard. You deserve it."

This was his chance, Freddie told himself. If he *had* read her mind correctly this morning.

"I was wondering—that table at the Zanzibaba . . ." he said. A little pink embarrassment crept into his cheeks. "I mean—that is, if you're free—we could sort of celebrate."

"You're mumbling, Freddie!" Amybelle said delightedly. "Do I understand that you're inviting me to dinner?"

"Well . . ." Freddie said. He squared his shoulders. "Yes, I am."

"Oh, good," Amybelle said. "I can be ready by seven . . ."

The Zanzibaba was a rich man's haunt. It was expensive, exotic, and the interior décor, Freddie thought—looking about him several hours later—was rather vulgar. But, then, success was vulgar, too. "I'm a vulgar success," he said to Amybelle.

"You're tiddly," Amybelle said, more stunning than ever in lacy black.

"I'm manager of Tumbril Advertising. My name is Braithwaite," Freddie said. Culpippin had given him the news late that afternoon.

"Tight as a newt."

Freddie grinned, sinking back on the pink satin sofa. His pink, expansive image grinned at him from every wall-mirror in their pinkly-lighted alcove. "Y'know," he said, "we've been here three hours without exchanging a cross word. Yet in the office recently we've argued all the time."

"But only because I deliberately started the arguments."

"What do you mean?" Freddie demanded.

Amybelle gave him a sly, feminine smile. "I'd been your secretary for three years, and you noticed me about as much

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as your office chair." She moved her beautiful bare shoulders.

" So I annoyed you to make you notice me. A woman can stand anything but indifference."

" Good heavens! "

" Well, it worked," Amybelle said. " I'm here."

" Ah, that was the bubbles," Freddie said. He watched them rising in his glass and giggled. " I've had bubble-trouble all day."

" Freddie, don't drink any more."

" Nonsense. I'm perfectly sober," Freddie said. He told her about the lunch and the bubbles he had seen. Then he told her about the bubbles he had seen over her own head.

" I thought nothing of the sort! " Amybelle said hotly.

" No? Well, of course, the bubbles were pure imagination," Freddie said. He leaned forward and put his hand over hers. " But I'm glad I imagined them. They got me the job I wanted—and the girl I wanted."

Amybelle squeezed his fingers. " Just like one of those advertisements you write," she said.

" Just like one," Freddie agreed, glancing uneasily into a mirror. And then he stiffened.

There was a bubble hovering over his head and, even in the mirror, its legend was clear: " *thinks*... Thanks to Hubbub Soap."

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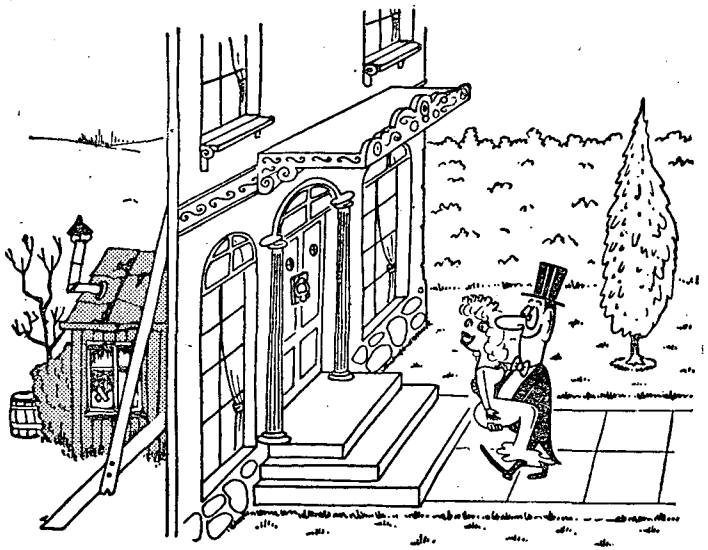

" I'm overwhelmed, darling! Exactly like in a Hollywood movie..."

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Mushroom Stew

He that high growth on cedars did bestow
Gave also lowly mushrumps leave to grow.

ROBERT SOUTHWELL

It has been said, and is often repeated, that mushrooms and toadstools can be tested by seeing whether they will peel or whether in cooking they will turn a piece of silver black. This notion goes back nearly two thousand years *and is completely wrong.* By this test Amanita Phalloides appears to be absolutely harmless. *There is no way of testing the safety of mushrooms other than actual, positive identification.* The safest plan, actually, is to eat only the common mushroom, comforted by the thought that there is really no other fungus to compare with it for the flavour.

PHILIP HARBEN, *Cookery Encyclopædia*

Blewit and See

Mauve Mushroom of the Midlands,
Tricholoma to the few, its
Name varies in most counties,
Though it's commonly called Blewits:
Unless you fear to try it,
With onions chop and fry it.

NICHOLAS HUSK, *Blewits*

Field Fare

EDIBLE FUNGI. It is one of the most ancient unwritten laws of Coarse Cricket that while it is at all times permissible for deep third man and other outlying fielders to pick such mushrooms and other edible fungi as they may find on the field of play, at least 25 per cent of the amount gathered by the said fielders shall be offered to the Captain.

SPIKE HUGHES, *The Art of Coarse Cricket*

It was no edible fungus that I ate.
Death knew, it seems, I lacked one doctorate.
D.D., D.Litt., D.Phil. I hadn't got any
D.Bot., nor even a pass degree in botany.

GEORGE ROSTREVOR HAMILTON, *The Lack*

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MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Baldur stared at him with covert disgust

BY PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

EVERY morning at seven-thirty, Dick Pendleton-Fenton left his flat in Marylebone and headed for Regent's Park with his superb alsatian, Baldur. After a brisk walk of half an hour or so, they went home to breakfast—Baldur on the warm milk and dry toast prescribed in the dog book, and Dr. Pendleton-Fenton on orange juice, dry toast, and coffee.

At nine o'clock, Dr. Fenton—as some patients chose to call him—arrived at his consulting-rooms in Weymouth Street with Baldur, who lay all morning in the well under his desk, patiently awaiting the break at one o'clock for the walk home and lunch.

At six, and again before bedtime, Dr. Fenton took Baldur for walks either in Regent's Park or round the Outer Circle. He followed to the letter the instructions for rearing in his dog book, and Baldur grew strong and handsome.

He had a rich, black stripe down his back, blending through brown to a pale buff on belly and legs. His manners were perfect. He never barked and never tugged at his leash. He did his teething on the leather toy that Dr. Fenton provided for the purpose. In lifts, if he was standing at the back, Baldur always waited until everybody else was out before he moved. He behaved, indeed, in a more civilised fashion than most people.

Once when Dr. Fenton had given a party and some of the guests had stayed until the small hours, delaying Baldur's nightly outing as well as preventing his sleeping, Baldur finally accompanied the guests to the door with more genuine friendliness than Dr. Fenton, whose hospitality was wearing thin by that time.

One of the guests, Bill Kirstein, even said something about it. "All right, we're leaving," he said. "You needn't throw us out. Why don't you learn some manners from that dog of yours?"

The remark hurt Dr. Fenton, falling as it did on a part of him already wounded—his pride. It hit all the more directly because during the previous week the same idea had crossed

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Pendleton-Fenton's mind: that Baldur's general comportment put his own to shame. Baldur could wait in a butcher's shop, for instance, with a better grace than Dr. Fenton, especially if there was a couple of garrulous housewives ahead of him. Dr. Fenton had once tried to sneak in his order out of turn, a woman had said something to him about it, and he had slunk from the butcher's shop feeling like a criminal.

Looking back, Dr. Fenton felt that his unhappiness dated from the time of Bill Kirstein's remark. From then on, he took no pleasure in Baldur and no real pleasure in anything. He began to feel inferior to the dog.

He tried to improve his own manners, made himself also wait at lifts, and remove his hat more often, but he never felt that his courtesy matched Baldur's, which was apparently inborn, since Dr. Fenton had devoted no time at all to training Baldur in etiquette.

Baldur's face, too, had a dignity and intelligence that made him look as if he regarded the man in the street—and even his master—with a profound and uncompromising judgment from behind a cordial exterior. Dr. Fenton began to feel the dog knew why he had been given to him and knew Dr. Fenton's particular faiblesse, a sense of failure. After all, the dog had been a present from a woman who had rejected Dick Fenton's proposal of marriage six months ago.

It had happened like this: for five years, Dr. Fenton had been mutely in love with the wife of his friend, Alec Wilkes. Theodora Wilkes was a tall, good-looking woman of about thirty-five, with sleek, black hair drawn into a roll at the back of her neck, and long, beautiful hands which, though they did nothing, looked as if they could cope with any situation.

Theodora liked people round her, and it was seldom that Dr. Fenton had been able to speak with her alone, except in the corner of a room at a cocktail party. When he was in a corner with her and free to utter a few shy banalities, he felt in the presence of a goddess of love, happiness, and savoir vivre—in short, a goddess of all that Dr. Fenton was not.

Dr. Fenton had never married. A son of parents who were not well off, he had won scholarships and completed his medical training. Being modest and unaggressive, he had not made the most of his opportunities, so that he was not earning a large income at the end of his first ten years of practice, and much of this had to go on overheads.

And after five years, his abject love of Theodora had made no progress, either. But his dreams had grown bolder and bolder. If he could marry her, he dreamt, his income would quadruple,

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his skill would increase, and even his voice would change for the better.

Then something happened that Dr. Fenton had never dared to dream of: Alec Wilkes died suddenly of a heart attack. Tactfully, Dr. Fenton had begun his courtship of Theodora.

After three months, he had asked her to marry him. The moment when Theodora had looked at him tenderly and said she must take some time to consider, had been the happiest of Dr. Fenton's life.

Then at their next meeting she had told him she could not marry him. No, it did not mean that she would never remarry, she said, and the inference was clear: she would never marry *him*.

Dr. Fenton had dragged through several weeks on the brink of suicide from depression. Then one day Theodora had telephoned him, and they made an appointment to see each other.

Dr. Fenton, who had hoped for a change of heart in Theodora, had gone home after the interview with nothing but a four-month-old alsatian puppy.

She had wanted to give him something alive, she said. The puppy would be a companion to him and would get him out of doors more often.

Dr. Fenton did not want to see Theodora again, even the memory of her long hands was painful to him, yet he had been inspired to take especially good care of Baldur because he had been a present from her. And being a man of some mental discipline, he had managed to concentrate on his nurture of the puppy to the exclusion of brooding, negative thoughts about Theodora. Still, she had rejected him, and the wound remained.

A knowledge of this was what Dr. Fenton felt he could see in Baldur's brown eyes as the dog lay watching him sometimes, particularly at dinner, which Dr. Fenton ate at the dining-recess in his kitchen.

He felt the alsatian was saying as he stared down his long nose, " You failure, you poor excuse for a man! Now I see you in your proper setting, eating your miserable dinner in shirtsleeves at the end of a kitchen table."

There would swim before Dr. Fenton's eyes Baldur's long and distinguished pedigree with all his canine ancestors and their respective prizes.

Dr. Fenton had finally unrolled his shirtsleeves and put on his jacket, and then set up the bridge table in the living-room to eat on. Now he set the bridge table every evening with a tablecloth. Baldur moved into the living-room and lay nearby on the rug, regarding him calmly, never begging, never commenting in any way except with those eloquent and majestic eyes, which for all

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Dr. Fenton's efforts still seemed to scorn and condemn without pity. When Dr. Fenton offered him part of his steak or the bone from his chop, Baldur accepted it with the formal, distant air of royalty.

Yet Dr. Fenton could not have said that the dog was not loyal, reasonably affectionate, and all that a good dog should be. On Thursdays, when Dr. Fenton was at a clinic and the dog could not go with him, Baldur greeted him at the door at six o'clock and seemed to shrug off Dr. Fenton's apologies for not having been able to take him out since morning.

But Dr. Fenton saw in Baldur's unfailing courtesy, which he felt cloaked an inner contempt, the same attitude he had seen or imagined so often in Theodora.

For instance, Theodora had often pressed him to stay on when the hour was late, which he knew now she had done for politeness' sake and not because she wanted his company. Dr. Fenton was no longer at ease in his own house, for the same reason he would not have been at ease had Theodora been living in the flat with him on some incredible platonic basis.

Dr. Fenton never lounged in his flat in shirtsleeves now, much less in pyjamas, even on Sundays. He almost never saw any friends, but he talked sometimes to Baldur.

He would ask Baldur if he was ready to go out—Baldur would signal with a wag or droop of his tail. He would ask him what he preferred for his dinner. Baldur knew the names of several kinds of meat, liked liver once a week, and signalled for steak most of the time. To tell the truth, Dr. Fenton would have loved to be free of him, but the dog's keen intelligence, which Dr. Fenton believed amounted almost to clairvoyance, kept him from even thinking of this. His depression deepened, and he brooded on suicide.

He was brooding on it late one night as he walked over Albert Bridge with Baldur after an evening in Battersea Park.

He released the dog with a command to run ahead of him. With a leap, Dr. Fenton mounted the iron balustrade. Another step or two and he was at the edge of the girders that hung above the river. Then he felt himself yanked backwards and he fell, grasping instinctively at the girders under his hands. Baldur was standing over him, looking at him in bewilderment, but with tail wagging. Dr. Fenton's mood had passed, and he proceeded on his way home.

The following weekend, he read in the newspaper of the marriage of Mrs. Theodora Wilkes to the Honourable Robert Frazier of Tallaculish. Dr. Fenton had never heard of him, but his very name evoked a picture of a handsome, cultured man

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of leisure and means. He imagined Theodora and her new spouse on a long honeymoon, perhaps a round-the-world cruise, their friends the cream of society. He took Baldur out for a long walk to try to distract his thoughts.

A man stopped him in Regent's Park, said he was a dog breeder, and asked if Dr. Fenton possibly wanted to sell Baldur. Dr. Fenton flinched at the words. If he didn't want to sell, then, he certainly wanted to enter him in a few shows, didn't he? The man told Dr. Fenton of a dog show at Olympia in three weeks, in which he was certain that Baldur could take a first prize in his own class.

"Of course. It really wouldn't be fair to the others to enter him," Dr. Fenton murmured nervously, and walked on.

His practice was suffering. He made two slight errors of judgment—and he slept wretchedly, expecting at any hour the ringing of the telephone and the voice of some indignant patient. His drooping posture reflected his spirits and contrasted with Baldur's fine bearing. When they walked along the street together, Dr. Fenton felt he could read in the eyes of passers-by what they thought of the two of them.

He no longer took sufficient pride in himself to care. His one objective was to look after the dog to the best of his ability. On Baldur's first birthday, he gave him a new chain-collar and leash, and Baldur had a steak at a fine restaurant. Then they went to the park to an open-air concert of Viennese music.

Dr. Fenton had come to dread his weekends, because he could never escape the dog's disapproving eyes. And with delayed reaction, he had begun to brood over Theodora and to imagine her life with the Honourable Robert Frazier.

On long Sunday afternoons, his imagination ran riot in wild arabesques. He saw Theodora wrapped in clouds of happiness and tobacco smoke, covered with jewellery he would never have been able to buy her, smiling contemptuously down on him. He had the form of a small skunk, cringing at her feet, while Baldur cavorted mockingly round him, nipping him, and laughing.

It was on a dismal Sunday afternoon that Dr. Fenton made his second suicide attempt.

He persuaded Baldur into the bedroom and closed the door. He shut the door of the kitchen tightly, and turned on all the jets of the gas stove. Then he sat down in front of it, with his head resting on the open oven door, and inhaled deep, delicious draughts of the sweet, dizzy-making gas. For the first time in many months he felt happy.

Dr. Fenton awakened slowly and found himself surrounded by

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blurred human forms. His head felt as if it was being crushed in a vice.

"You'll be all right," the hall porter said. "We heard your dog barking. He nearly broke the door down. Good dog . . ."

Dr. Fenton saw Baldur's handsome face peering down at him, and realised he was back in the old world again.

Later, he learnt that Baldur had opened the bedroom door, which had no key for its lock, had then yanked the kitchen door open, dragged him into the air, and barked and barked until some neighbours had called the porter and broken in.

Baldur was photographed by all the newspapers in London, and Dr. Fenton was interviewed exhaustively about him, his personality, what he ate, what tricks he could do, and so on. No one asked Dr. Fenton a single question about himself.

The next day, Baldur's face smiled out from the front pages of two picture papers, while inside there was a re-enactment of the rescue in six consecutive photos, which Baldur must have obliged with while Dr. Fenton had been shunted off to bed by the doctors. Even the more conservative papers gave two columns to the story with a photograph of Baldur. MAN'S BEST FRIEND, they called the dog.

Dr. Fenton was called Dr. Benton in one newspaper, Mr. Fenton in another, and a veterinary surgeon in a third.

For days afterwards, people stopped and petted Baldur in the street, and Dr. Fenton was asked if it really was Baldur. Baldur acknowledged the pats and praises with tailwags, but as time passed he showed a certain impatience with all the fuss, as if he knew when the excitement should be wearing off.

Dr. Fenton felt that Baldur kept a sharper eye than ever on him, and he decided to give up the idea of suicide as long as Baldur was with him. He felt trapped, but from the time of his decision not to attempt suicide again, he also felt reconciled. His feeble instinct of self-preservation began to stir, and showed first in his holding his head up when he and Baldur walked the streets together. He squared his shoulders and walked with a quicker step.

Now at least, Dr. Fenton thought, passers-by could not say that he *looked* so much worse than his dog.

Dr. Fenton tried hard to take pride in his work, too. He did not know if his diagnosis improved, but three weeks passed in normal, efficient routine. In the evenings after dinner, he plunged into books of philosophy and history. He bought records and studied French. His mind, trained to attack facts and retain them, assailed his French grammar the same way. To

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improve his fluency, he chatted with himself in French in the bath and while he shaved.

Studying and reading until midnight or later made it difficult for him to fall asleep once he went to bed, so he kept his radio on softly all night, tuned to a station that played only classical music, which he knew Baldur preferred to dance music. Mozart and Richard Strauss, Dr. Fenton found he liked, too, and he bought some long-playing records of their music for the gramophone that he had not touched for two or three years.

When the Kirsteins rang him up to invite him to a Saturday-night game of bridge, Dr. Fenton politely excused himself on the grounds of having another engagement. Actually, he preferred to stay at home with his books, he realised; and the prospect of Bill Kirstein's loud laughter, of losing money—which he always did—and of having a hangover on Sunday besides, was not attractive to him.

Previously he had been to see the Kirsteins out of loneliness, but he no longer felt so lonely. After all, there was Baldur, and he felt that the dog regarded him less critically since he had taken up French and classical music, but perhaps it was only that Baldur himself was glad of quiet company every evening. It had been some weeks now since Dr. Fenton had even gone to a cinema.

His practice slowly began to pick up. There were no more empty hours and half hours in the day. His old patients had sometimes recommended new ones to him, but now they arrived at the rate of half a dozen a week. Dr. Fenton raised his fees very slightly. He was still below the level of the majority of consultants of his ability—two or three of his patients told him so themselves—but he knew that people would respect him more if his fees were higher. That was human nature.

With the extra money, he bought new carpets, some attractive Cézanne and Matisse reproductions for his walls, and even had his consulting-rooms repainted a pleasant green.

All this put him on a different footing with Baldur. At first he thought he only imagined it, but now he was sure. Baldur really smiled at him when Dr. Fenton proposed a walk in the park.

When he ate his dinner, with a book propped in front of him, the dog lay quite close to his feet and no longer stared at him with a covert disgust. And, in fact, Dr. Fenton did not see how the dog could view him with disgust at dinner now, since the table was always impeccably set, lit with candles, and the food was no longer out of a tin, either.

In the last months, Dr. Fenton had been reading a French

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cookery book by way of making himself familiar with the phrases found on French menus, and was experimenting with many of the recipes. There were evenings when his cooking was so good that he wished he had invited a friend to dinner. This wish lasted only while he was eating. He was glad enough to have the rest of his evening to himself.

One morning he received a telephone call in his consulting-rooms from Theodora. For an instant, his blood ran cold and a kind of panic made him tongue-tied. The Robert Fraziers stood for a Medusa-like monster that he had been trying to keep at the very back of his mind, since to think of them even briefly was to paralyse himself, to demolish the ego that he had been so painfully rebuilding.

Fortunately, during the minute he felt tongue-tied, Theodora kept talking. She said in a very kind tone that she hoped he had been well the last year, and that she was ringing up to ask if he would come to a cocktail party she and her husband were giving the following Friday.

"I—well, I think I am free, yes. That's very—"

"Good! Bring Baldur, too. We've got a dalmatian. They can keep each other company." She laughed her gay, easy laugh, and gave him the address.

When he hung up, he was trembling. He had accepted before he realised what he was doing. If he'd only had some warning, so that he could have prepared a courteous, convincing statement as to why he could *not* come! He thought of ringing back that evening and declining, but it seemed cowardly. No, face it, he told himself. Keep your head up the way Baldur does, face it for half an hour and take your leave.

On Friday at six, as he rang the bell marked R. FRAZIER in the block of flats off Cheyne Walk, he felt that his self-confidence was only a thin shell, no deeper than his freshly-pressed suit or his consciously-erect head. The first sight of Theodora, he thought, radiantly happy in her marriage to Robert Frazier, would crumple him to that wretched image of the skunk which he still vividly remembered. Theodora answered the bell. Dr. Fenton had rather expected a maid.

"Welcome!" she said with an abandoned swing of her arm. "And Baldur. My, hasn't he grown! Come in."

The room was quite small and crowded with people, all noisily talking and drinking. Theodora took him straight to a gateleg table covered with bottles and glasses and soup-bowls of ice cubes, and mixed a strong Scotch-and-soda for him, saying that he probably didn't know anybody here and could face it better with a glass of something. He realised then that she was a little tipsy.

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Suddenly a large, spotted dalmatian bounded out of nowhere and crashed against Dr. Fenton's thighs, nearly knocking him down. His grip on Baldur's short leash tightened, but there was no need because Baldur stood quite still in the face of the dalmatian's barking which sounded like claps of thunder in the small room.

"Susie! Susie, *quiet!*" Theodora was yelling, tugging at the dog's collar; but Susie would not be silenced, and her splayed legs made it impossible for Theodora to budge her. Susie crouched, barking, wagging her tail, inviting Baldur to romp, but Baldur only gazed at the dog with the smiling indulgence that an adult might show towards an unruly child.

"I suppose Susie's just a pup!" Dr. Fenton shouted above the barking, smiling.

"A what? Susie!" Theodora's head snapped back alarmingly as Susie bolted free, and she caught herself against Dr. Fenton's shoulder.

Susie had begun to run in a circle round Baldur. People shrank against the walls to get out of her way, jostling each other, spilling drinks. A small table was knocked over.

"I shouldn't have brought Baldur!" Dr. Fenton yelled apologetically. "I'm sorry. Shall I take him out?"

"Susie, *stop!* Bob, lock her up in the bathroom."

"Somebody'll only let her out again!" shouted a plump, pink-faced man with a drink in an armchair.

One of the male guests made a dive for Susie's collar, hung on, and stopped her, then tugged her into an adjacent hall.

"I suppose she's just a pup," Dr. Fenton said again to Theodora, smiling.

"She's four. She's Bob's dog. I can't do anything with her and he won't. Just look what she's done to the sofa end."

Dr. Fenton realised with a shock that was almost horror that the plump, pink-faced man in the armchair, whom Theodora had called Bob, must be Robert Frazier. "He's—your husband?" Dr. Fenton asked, still incredulous.

"Yes. Come and meet him. Bob? Want you to meet Dick, one of my former husband's old friends," Theodora said.

Robert Frazier did not get up, only waved his glass and said, "Make yourself at home. This is a housewarming, y'know, and we want it *warm*."

"I didn't know," Dr. Fenton said, not knowing what to say. The man's appearance still held him rigid with surprise. He looked about thirty-five, though his face was so soft and weak he might have been older. And he was certainly tight. "Where have you been living?"

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"With his parents in Ireland," supplied the blonde girl seated on an arm of Robert Frazier's chair. "But they've thrown the honeymooners out now, and he's going to make his own way in the world, isn't he, Bobsie?" She kissed him on the cheek.

"She's my cousin, y'know," Robert Frazier said, with a wink to nobody in particular.

"Kissing cousins! Ha! Ha! Ha!" somebody yelled.

Speechless with shock and embarrassment, Dr. Fenton moved away, looking for Theodora. She was standing by a window, gazing out dreamily. Once beside her, he did not know what to say. He had prepared himself to ask if she had gone abroad since he had seen her, even prepared some congratulatory remarks about her husband. Remarks it was quite impossible to make now.

Dr. Fenton glanced round the room and his eye fell on a wide, silver bowl that he recalled from the days when Theodora had been married to Alec Wilkes. It was a beautiful bowl, Grecian in spirit, and it had always held grapes or floating flowers of some kind at Alec's and Theodora's house. Someone had set a half-finished cocktail in it. The beauty of the silver bowl made him realise the ugliness and mediocrity of the rest of the furniture—the varnished bookshelf, the loudly-patterned curtains, the clumsy armchair in which Robert Frazier slumped. Dr. Fenton suddenly recalled the smell of lamb stew that had greeted him when he stepped out of the lift a few minutes before.

And the people here—Dr. Fenton had expected the upper crust of society. It was almost funny. The people were about the calibre of the Kirsteins. He had no sooner thought that than the Kirsteins came in. One of the guests had opened the door for them.

Bill Kirstein greeted Robert Frazier noisily, then saw Dr. Fenton and charged towards him. "Dick, where've you been hiding? I didn't expect to see *you* here!" His hearty slap on Dr. Fenton's shoulder brought a very low growl of warning from Baldur, which Dr. Fenton felt as a slight vibration of the leash. "Still the same old grind? Keeping the undertakers in business. Still got that hound, I see."

"Oh, I've been getting about quite a bit lately," Dr. Fenton said with a smile. "What've you people been up to?"

Bill Kirstein looked at him suspiciously. "Here, what're you getting so highhat about? Snubbing all your old friends?"

"Not at all!" Dr. Fenton felt himself blushing a little. On the other hand, why should he feel apologetic? What had he done? He stood up still straighter and looked Bill right in the eye, pleasantly.

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"Be seeing you." Smiling in a slightly rattled way, Bill drifted off to Theodora.

Dr. Fenton watched her come awake and kiss Bill on the cheek. Bill was circling her waist with his arm, familiarly. He never would have done that with Alec around, Dr. Fenton thought; and Theodora would not have permitted it, either. Alec and Theodora had known the Kirsteins slightly for several years, but they had never been close friends; and Theodora had not invited them again, he distinctly remembered, after one party at their house when Bill had become obstreperously drunk.

Baldur stood by his side, gazing straight before him with a rather puzzled expression, Dr. Fenton thought, at a woman who was sitting on a man's lap.

"Tell me about Baldur," Theodora said suddenly, reaching down to pat the dog's head. "Has he been a good companion for you?"

She evidently hadn't read about Baldur saving his life, or was too drunk to remember it now, Dr. Fenton thought. "He's been a wonderful companion," he said, smiling. "Haven't you, Baldur? Don't you recognise Theodora?" he asked the dog; and the look in Baldur's eyes as he glanced up made Dr. Fenton wish he hadn't asked that question.

"Have you taught him any tricks?" Theodora asked, pushing back some straying hair with one of the long, limp hands that Dr. Fenton had once thought so exquisite.

"He doesn't need to learn tricks. He understands everything that goes on just like a human being," Dr. Fenton replied.

Theodora's face changed slowly. She tried to stand taller, swaying a bit. "You're different, you know. You've changed a *lot*," she said almost hostilely. Drunken tears suddenly poured into her eyes, making them glassier. "If you don't like me any more, why did you come here?"

"But, Theodora, I do like—"

"I may be living a lot more simply, but it's my life, isn't it? Who're you to look down your nose?" Her voice rose, and the hubbub in the room came to an abrupt halt.

"Siddown, Dora, you've had enough!" yelled Robert Frazier from the depths of his armchair.

Somebody laughed. Conversation started again.

"My apologies, Theodora, but I still don't know what I've done," Dr. Fenton said with a smile. "It's a charming party and I'm very happy to see you."

"I don't believe you!" Theodora said with a drunken, persistent stare, and though her voice was loud, nobody paid any attention now.

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" I think I should be going, Theodora. Thank you very much for asking me and thanks from Baldur, too." He turned and went up to Robert Frazier. " Good-bye, Mr. Frazier. It's been a pleasure meeting you."

" Glad you came. S'pleasure's mine. Don't mind Dora, she gets like that." Robert Frazier waved casually.

" And good riddance! Stuffed shirt! " Theodora's voice yelled behind him as he opened the door.

The door closed behind him, but did not quite shut out a horse-laugh from Bill Kirstein.

Dr. Fenton took the lift down and started walking, conjugating French subjunctives to relax his taut nerves. After several blocks he began to feel better, and he remarked to Baldur that it was only another fortnight until their summer holiday. Dr. Fenton was taking a month off and going to a hotel in the Lakes where Baldur, he had learnt, would be welcome.

Baldur looked up at him with a smiling adoration and with understanding. Dr. Fenton winked at him. Never again would he see Theodora Frazier on an unapproachable pedestal, never again envy the man whose wife she was, never again see a golden aura round Robert Frazier. Dr. Fenton began to whistle like a schoolboy. Life, his very own life that he had thought so humdrum and hopeless, seemed a blessed and happy thing, full of promise and full of joy. His eyes lingered on a pretty woman who approached him and went by.

" I've walked up an appetite, Baldur. What do you say to our finding a restaurant and sharing a nice steak right away? "

Baldur looked up at the word " steak," and pulled a trifle more eagerly on his leash, turning at the next corner towards the Chelsea restaurant which he knew his master favoured when it came to steak.

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★ ★ ★

CLEAN BOWLED

All the best jokes are " private ": that is to say that they depend on the talker and the hearer knowing the same people and talking the same idiom.

Public jokes are few. They return in a regular cycle of twenty years. The best public joke I know is:

Shop Assistant: " Would you like it with DOG written on it? "

Woman (after cogitation): " No, thank you. My dog cannot read and my husband does not drink water."

Quoted as the favourite funny story of Evelyn Waugh

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NYMPH OVERBOARD

Her face was lit up by a tender phosphorescence

BY JACQUES PERRET

THE SCHOONER was becalmed, stuck in an oily sea facing a rather grandiloquent sunset. Solemn clouds showed themselves along the horizon, and wide shafts of powdery gold filtered through a bank of cumulus like so many divine messengers.

Three sailors were squatting on deck silently playing at carotte.

The rigging was as still and silent as the sea; there was no sound but the *tock* of the sailors' knives as they stuck in the deck, and that seemed an enormous noise, as if the sea had lent all the echoes from its deeps for the purposes of this game.

There was no one to enjoy this sunset except the figurehead at the prow: a fine slip of a nereid, carved in heart-of-oak, swelling her bosom and arching her loins under the thrust of the ship's stem, while breathing a sad, proud tune into her conch. A thin ray of sunlight fell upon her broad belly, revealing among the green fleece of seaweed the last traces of pink paint, long since faded by the spindrift; then the warm beams spread and bathed the whole of her body. A few barnacles in the hollow of her thigh yawned gently, and a scrap of seawrack sticking to her arm popped one of its little bladders.

She stretched slowly, and half a dozen periwinkles dropped from her armpits. Then with a slow, sensuous movement she detached her shoulders from the ship's stem, and dived. She made no splash as she entered the syrupy sea, which closed over her with a discreet lapping noise: *glook.*

Captain Amador, a little man in his fifties, rather stout and with puffy, placid eyes, was taking advantage of the flat calm to shave himself by the light of the paraffin lamp in his cabin. He was in slippers and mauve pyjama trousers. A nice rub with eau-de-Cologne had toned up his torso and, his heart made happy by this hygienic atmosphere, he gaily plied his shaving-brush and

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hummed, hindered only by the lather which kept his lips closed. As usual he was wearing his cap.

As he soaped his cheeks he strolled into the next room, glanced at his watch which said six minutes past ten, folded with his free hand the chart spread out on the table, closed the rusty compass which was lying by the side of the bosun's unfinished game of patience, walked under the scuttle to see if there was any hint of a breeze and, finding a flat calm still, swore—though with no particular bitterness, merely keeping up the eternal dialogue which goes on between captains and the wind.

Then he returned to the cabin, bent down to look in the shaving mirror and began to take off his eight-day beard.

He had reached the dangerous corner beneath the chin when he heard someone descending the companionway. It was not the bosun, who always wore boots, nor any of the sailors who had no business down there. Perhaps the cabin-boy, sent to fetch something for the bosun? But he always came down some fancy way, hopping, or sliding on his backside.

When the captain heard someone in the other room, he called out, " Who's that? "

" Me."

His razor motionless, one hand still stretching the skin of his neck, Amador frowned, trying vainly to identify this strange voice, then walked to the threshold.

" Damn it! " he exclaimed. His face, faintly ghostlike because of the lather, expressed extreme surprise.

The figurehead was sitting sideways with one elbow on the table, her shoulders draped with fresh seaweed which dripped on to the bosun's game of patience.

Eventually the captain spoke in a rather aggressive tone. " I must say, you might have dried yourself before coming in here. Wait; I'll be back in a moment."

He put his hand into the flag-locker, mopped his face with the flag of Holland, put on his pyjama jacket, and returned to sit down opposite his visitor.

" Will you be so good as to tell me where you have been to get yourself in such a state? " he asked, gathering up the damp pack of cards.

He rose and lifted his hand to the hanging lantern. " A fine thing! " he grumbled on as he turned up the wick.

" A figurehead that has served for four generations on ships of the same family; a figurehead of heart-of-oak, cherished from father to son, perhaps the last figurehead navigating in the Gulf of Mexico, behaving now like a streetwalker, slipping away to run after tritons—and, what is more, on a foul seabed.

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" I took soundings just now," he went on, sitting down heavily, " and it is just stinking mud. Let me see your feet! And what about your conch? What have you done with your conch? "

He put on his severest face, the one he used for intimidating cabin-boys, but his great, chestnut-brown eyes wavered a little and his mouth was rather dry; the presence of the figurehead somewhat disturbed him.

Illuminated now by the soft glow of the lamp, she sat there before him, very upright, with that noble curve to her body which two centuries of duty at the prow gives one; the paint had disappeared long since from her flanks, where the waves had left the hard, veined wood, polished by foam. Her worn, battered face, bleached by salt and sun, with her snub nose and her great eyes where a line of blue could still be made out under the darkened eyelids—her motionless face was lit up by a tender phosphorescence which visibly intimidated Captain Amador.

" Well? Tell me now, what have you done with your conch? Have you lost it? "

She passed one hand slowly through her wet locks, and drew from them some small, mauve starfish, which she gently placed on the table. " I don't want a wooden conch any more," she said. " I want a real one to blow. I know where I can get some very melodious ones, of the genus turbinella sacra, which have already been used in Neptune's band."

She had a curious voice, widely undulating and partly lost in a complicated system of echoes, with strange resonances. At first her words had a gurgling sound, as though coming from a capricious whirlpool, then they rose in a spurt of impatient bubbles, flowering at last in a rather loud and arrogant sonority; ebbing in a breathless, confidential whisper which already contained the beginning of the next wave. She did not seem able to control this sequence.

" There, you see," growled the captain, " you've made yourself hoarse. That's what you get by these escapades. I don't mind what you do about the conch, but I think it's a bit childish. Today you want a real conch, and tomorrow it will be something else, real hair, or even—"

The captain stopped, perceiving that he was about to embark on rather obscure matters concerned with the essential nature of things in general and oak in particular; but the figurehead, leaning on the table, gently stretched out her arm towards him.

" Touch it! " she said. " Go on, touch it. That will teach you something."

He wanted to, did Captain Amador, but he dared not. Eye

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and ear can come to terms with a mystery at a distance, but you have to be wary of a more direct approach.

"All right, all right," he said. "When I want to, and not before; when you have gone back to your post."

"I've had enough of posing, my dear Amador; I've got to leave you before someone puts this nice little ship in a bottle."

"What's that?" said the captain, frowning. He shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyes to heaven.

"All right, we'll say no more about it. And you, my dear, will take a little drop of rum with me to clear your throat."

"I should love just a drop," she said, curving her little finger, which split at the joint, *crack*, where there was a knot. She sighed—her breath diffused a fine odour of fresh fish—and she moved a little, showing her worn profile, with its nose barely projecting, and its split lips, and the cheekbones where a nacreous deposit of salt sparkled.

"I've known many a room before this," she said, her pale eyeballs turning round it. "I've known some magnificent ones at the stern with tapestries, scarlet velvet held up by spun-gold hawsers, with enormous plummets that swayed as the ship rolled, and silver chandeliers carried away from the high altars of Colombian cathedrals, and officers in silks leaning over the railings above a wake smelling of cinnamon and marjoram . . ."

"They let you in there?" asked Amador incredulously.

"There, as well as in the between-decks saturated with the ancient stench of gunpowder, with blood caked between the joints of the planking and sabres ready at the heads of the bunks. Three seamen were playing the ocarina there to dissipate the stink of scurvy, and I—I had come to play on a muted conch beneath the hammock of a delirious lad disembowelled by a shot from a six-pounder. Oh, Amador dear, and the hot nights of love on the bridge in the smell of pitch from the fire-ships! I could choose in those days; whether cabin-boy, captain, or carpenter, he was always a god."

"And what good could you, a wooden statue, possibly be to them?" asked Amador, much irritated.

"When you meet them one day, on a bed of mud or coral, they will tell you what kind of wood I am made of."

There was a silence. The captain stared at her with his great brown eyes. Under his slightly-quivering eyelid a moist roll of flesh gleamed. His mind was suddenly filled with an ardour, an extravagant jealousy, an inhuman desire, a faint effort to understand, and finally came the reflection that he was newly shaved.

"Oh?" he said, a little awkwardly advancing an eager hand. "Oh, really?"

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The figurehead lightly slapped the tips of his fingers with a scrap of seaweed, then let her arm fall back on to the table, bang! like a mallet.

"What are you thinking of, my dear Amador?"

The captain was cut to the quick to see that she was laughing at him. He opened his mouth to protest, but the figurehead spoke again, caressing her abundantly flowing locks.

"You are dreaming, captain. Remember that I am only a family souvenir on this ship, a museum piece, a mascot that you hang under the bowsprit to watch over your freight, your wretched little cargo of tins and boxes.

"What do you care when you see me entering port, naked and with my feet dipping in puddles of dirty oil, playing my conch in all that din of engines and those mechanical screechers you call sirens?

"A fine sight I am in all that disgusting mess—performing like a mechanical puppet, a grotesque musical clown. No, it was a weakness in me to wish to survive. The tunes I play are the thunders of the gods, and people today, except for a few deaf old salts, can hear none of it, and say that I only pretend to blow.

"I wished, too, to prolong my stay on account of the poets. Yes, I had scruples about them. But they are beginning to get on my nerves, those stupid poets, since they started to treat me as a mere figment of imagination.

"I am a poem in myself, a poem in oak and flesh. Do I look a mere symbol, I ask you? Plunderers of wrecks, that's what poets are; all these fondlers of figures of speech, all these exploiters of masts and blasts and decks and wrecks, crying 'Land ho!' without having ever seen the sea. Oh, they make me laugh."

Captain Amador clicked his tongue and nodded his head. "These are all personal grievances," he said. "You are in your dotage, like a grandmother regretting the days of candles. But what matters is that you want to leave me. We shall have to see about that, my dear."

"I think it must be tonight," said the figurehead, smiling very slowly because of her cracked lips—and for the first time you could see her teeth: large teeth, bluish like the inside of a mussel-shell.

The captain banged his fist on the table.

"I am master on board this ship, and you are not going."

"Yes, tonight," continued the figurehead, playing with the scattered starfish lying on the table. "The seabed is good here, and it will be a pleasant place to rest. I met a little sister down here, a pretty little figurehead from a brigantine which sank in 1803. She has kept very lively.

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" Just think! She had only fifteen years of service before she went down.

" She introduced me to a superb triton in massive cedar, still at the prow of the hull of a Spanish vessel; he's a splendid creature with scales down to the loins—"

" That's enough! " said the captain roughly, standing up. " If you don't return to your post immediately I'll send you down to the hold to be gnawed by rats. I'll hang you from the yard-arm . . ."

" Come, come, those are not the words for a man in pyjamas . . . And when are you going to remove your cap, you boor? "

The captain slowly sat down. He took off his cap with the servile air of a man ready to eat humble pie. And he poured himself a glass of rum.

" You can't expect me to disguise myself as a pirate in a bandanna or a corsair in a periwig in order to fit myself for your company," he said in a gentle voice.

" I am ready to do a great many things for your sake, but I can't abolish the steam engine and restore the reign of the buccaneers, slavery, and the spice trade, the gold of Peru, and the treasure of the Jesuits—"

" How sweet you are, dear Amador! " said the figurehead tenderly. " And now, give me another finger of rum . . .

" By the way, have you a pin? We can have some winkles. I've some nice fresh ones between my toes."

" I'm not very partial to winkles," muttered the captain as he searched for a pin in the lapel of his jacket.

And then, thinking perhaps that the matter was settled, he sighed, " All the same, you have to live in your own day. What's that pattern you've made with the starfish? The Great Bear? But that star at the end is too far away; you should put it there, so."

" You forget that I have watched the Great Bear for thousands upon thousands of nights, as well as all the other constellations that have nothing to tell us. I think there is nothing more paltry than the firmament. The smallest sea-urchin can tell me more than the Great Bear.

" Thank you. Good health, Amador. I like rum, its bouquet goes well with the trade-winds. All the mouths I kissed once had a little flavour of rum. Besides—" she slapped her chest— " rum matures well in oak. Your good health, Amador. It's the last time I shall drink with a man on the surface; you can tell that to your messmates."

She emptied her glass in a murmur of splashing surf, and arched her back proudly, and more flamboyantly than ever.

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Her hand, like a fin, caressed her faintly-mossgrown flanks.

"Stay here!" Now there was nothing in the captain's voice but love.

"Stay!" he begged her. "I will furnish a fine cabin for you, with silk curtains, the softest carpet imaginable, and as much fresh water as you want. I will have you baptised and call you by a pretty name, Concepcion or Rosita, and we shall be happy.

"We can't leave each other; you can't desert this schooner; you can't leave a sailing ship, with her sails bellying in the breeze . . ."

She smiled, blinking her eyes as though there was a storm blowing up, and said simply, "Then you come with me; we will go down together."

"And then?"

"Then? Long walks through the ribs of frigates with the shades of buccaneers and captains of galleons.

"Dancing with my sisters among the doubloons and pistoles gleaming under the rocks; the endless yarns they spin in foc'sles crumbling under the weight of seaweed; the siesta between sea-bed and surface on the borders of the Gulf Stream; the sirens' ball on a carpet of smooth anemones; the Argonauts' tacking-chanty; the marbles of Atlantis and the bells of Ys; the shoals of tritons dislodged from the depths of rusty cannon; the great meetings of all men shipwrecked off Cape Horn; the phantom ship that sinks every quarter for a change of crew.

"The great fights between the seamen of Actium and the corsairs of Dunkirk; the roundabout of sea-horses flanking the natal shell of Venus; the muddy estuaries where the amphibious dragons come to deposit their spawn.

"At noon we'll visit the great bivalves, who will show us their pearls; and when you tire of chasing nereids through the groves of coral I will take you into an old trireme of Aegos and you will hear the ancient Zigite bard who has been singing of his battles continuously since 404 B.C.

"And you will see some amazing things: a murex amusing himself by discharging his purple under the floating jellyfish hanging like lanterns among the sporting dolphins—real dolphins, from Delphi.

"Be quick and make up your mind; I'm going down now."

She stood up, strangely heavy.

"You see," she said, "my density is no longer that of a being who lives in air."

And she raised her arms to smooth her hair in the solemn, laborious movement of a deep-sea diver.

"I must say," she went on, in a voice that already bubbled, "I should have preferred to make the classic dive on the prow of

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the schooner, with all hands on board; a majestic slow-motion descent in the old style, with water regurgitating from the scuttles . . . Couldn't you tell the carpenter to start a leak?"

"It's an idea," said the captain, "but the insurance people would make a fuss. Couldn't you wait for the next cyclone?"

"No, I must go now."

The captain approached the inconstant nereid. He had an intensely childish expression of greed; his mouth was half open, his eyes dilated.

The figurehead twitched her nostrils.

"Besides," she said, "I must tell you that already I sense in you the reek of a drowning man."

"Again!" said Amador. "Tell me again!"

"Very well. Come close; here, closer. Now listen! I will loosen my hair and you shall smell the seawrack and the sweat of oak; but hold to the table, because the odour of seawrack soon makes men drunk if they are not used to it. Place your ear against mine. Can you hear? Can you hear the sea? How your heart is beating, little captain!"

When the mate came below, he found Captain Amador in a singular posture. In the first place, he was not wearing his cap. Next, he was bent double, and his face had a rather dazed look upon it. One hand lay on the corner of the table and the other was curved round his ear.

On the table there were two empty glasses, half a dozen starfish, and some winkle shells.

"Captain!"

"What is it?" said Amador, sitting up suddenly. "Has she gone overboard?"

"Ah, you've guessed? Yes, she's gone overboard; I don't know just when it happened, but it was the bosun who noticed it, and . . ."

The captain climbed the companionway at full speed, and at the top shouted, "Haul her out, for Neptune's sake!"

It was a beautiful moonlight night, still, a flat calm.

While Amador went from one side of the deck to the other exhorting his men to keep their eyes skinned, the bosun ran after him explaining.

"It must have been that cabin-boy. He went aloft to put a gasket on the stay-sail, and as usual he rested his foot on her head; he felt her shake a bit, but she's been doing that for a long time, and anyway he never heard her fall."

"Lower away the jolly-boat and the dinghy!" ordered the captain.

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" I'd have thought she would have floated," said the bosun in a perplexed voice. Then he turned to old Cirilo, who knew everything.

" Have you ever heard of a ship's figurehead that sank to the bottom, eh? "

Old Cirilo unfurled his long lips, which he habitually kept tucked inside his toothless mouth, and murmured in his bleating voice, " It doesn't often happen. I did hear of one that went down after giving fever to all the crew, and they found her again outside a pub in Quebec."

The captain shouted orders to the departing jolly-boat.

Someone shouted back, " Perhaps she can't swim! "

At these words Amador flew into such a rage that everyone realised this was no joking matter. Many of them, too, began to think that the affair smelt a bit odd; one of those not very Christian and unpropitious happenings that occasionally hatch out in a flat calm.

The bosun, however, tried to treat the incident as a perfectly natural and simple one. " Of course," he said to the captain, " she was a fine piece of work, such as you don't see every day."

Amador did not reply.

Old Cirilo, who knew everything, said in his bleating voice, " You can't replace a figurehead like her, it can't be done now. Even in my young days there was only Walter Bubble, at 'Frisco, who could make them in that style, and his weren't perfect, because his model was his young sister who had a real silly face. Today there's only the stuff in the catalogue of Hannibal & Son, and they make insignificant little bits of junk, nasty scraps of gilding, fancy goods for varnished yachts, that's all; but to say they could supply a real figurehead, well, they couldn't."

" All right, all right," said the mate.

" Where's the carpenter? " asked the captain in a solemn voice. " I want to speak to him."

A cable's length from the ship, the two boats crossed each other's paths slowly in the glinting moonlight.

" You want me, captain? " asked the carpenter, a corpulent, placid man with a moustache.

Amador considered him for some time, as if his appearance had suddenly become disappointing; then, in a slightly breathless voice, he said, " Chips, I suppose you've sometimes stopped a leak? "

" Of course."

" And if I were to ask you . . ."

" What? "

" Never mind. I'll send for you again soon."

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And then he roared to the bosun, " Hoist the foghorn on the deckhouse! "

The bosun asked for this order to be confirmed, and then repeated it three times to Cirilo, who wagged his head at Amador in a surprised and interested way.

On the deckhouse, the captain, ghostly in his mauve pyjamas in the moonlight, stood by the side of the foghorn which the cabin-boy was operating.

Sometimes the men could see the captain place his hand on the boy's shoulder to stop the machine, then listen for a reply. Below, old Cirilo, who knew everything but who told himself that one is never too old to learn, also listened, just in case.

Towards two o'clock in the morning Amador appeared to lose all hope and had the foghorn taken down again. He jumped to the deck, called the carpenter, and seized him by the arm in an affectionate and manly clutch.

" Chips," he began in a solemn tone. No doubt the words he was meditating were a little difficult to bring out, for a silence followed.

" You must get your largest drill . . ."

Another silence, and then a long creak came from the rigging, followed by a lapping of water to port.

" A breeze! " shouted the bosun, while the ship quivered in the midst of a volley of happy oaths.

" What am I to do with the drill? " asked the carpenter.

The captain had turned his face to the breeze. He passed his hand through his curly mop of hair, then in a clear and rapid voice replied, " I wanted the drill to make a hole in this airpocket we've been in, and now I want someone to fetch me my cap, quick, and my trousers, too, and jump to it! "

He took command of the operation himself and the screech of the tackle made a splendid fanfare in the cool night. From the jib to the masthead all the canvas was swelling and all the rigging was taut.

The prow, naked and bereft, seemed to fumble for a moment, as though unsure of its direction, but Captain Amador was at the tiller, a solid bite of food in his hand and his ear wide open to the breeze from port, the good breeze that was telling him many simple things that he already knew.

A shadow moved up beside him to look at the compass which barely rocked under the tiny glow of the binnacle lamp.

" What d'ye want? "

" I just came to see," said old Cirilo, who knew everything. " I came to see, because sometimes when they go away, they take the North with them."

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The captain looked at him placidly. Then after a moment's reflection he replied in a voice almost smothered by an enormous mouthful of bread.

" They take my grandmother! Get aloft and help your mates, we are going to sail as close to this wind as we can."

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FIN SENTIMENT?

Britons never, never, never shall be married to a mermaid
At the bottom of the deep blue sea.

Oxford Song

TRAFFIC JAM

Jam yesterday, jam tomorrow—and jam today, too . . . But while you are waiting for the nervous lady motorist in front to disentangle the groceries from her handbrake, refresh yourself by trying to get the pips out of our jam.

Gonged ? Try page 143

1. *A distracted foreigner comes out from under the bonnet of his car and asks if he can borrow a clé, a chiave, a llave, or a Schraubenschlussel, and where can he obtain essence, benzina, gasolina, or Benzin. What does he want?*

2. *Which mogul of the motor industry wrote " Today and Tomorrow? "*

3. *What heroes of detection and thriller dignified their cars by these names:*
   a. Mrs. Merdle (had a titled owner);
   b. Lily Christine III (was treated rough by a don);
   c. Hirondel (turn to hagiology for the answer).

4. *What is the British colour in international motor racing?*

5. *Can you discover the well-known writers inside these vehicles:*
   a. He saith, git a car;
   b. L. Cherish Motor Pyre;
   c. Walk, D.A.? Drive!

6. *What heroine of song or story: a. wheeled a wheelbarrow like her father and mother before; b. was thunderstruck to learn her uncle had ordered the carriage to take her out to dinner; c. left the stagecoach at a place called Whitcross?*

7. *Involved in an accident while driving abroad, what is the first thing you should do?*

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Road to Romany

Upon the road to Romany
It's stay, friend, stay!
There's lots o' love and lots o' time
To linger on the way;
Poppies for the twilight,
Roses for the noon,
It's happy goes as lucky goes,
To Romany in June.

WALLACE IRWIN, *From Romany to Rome*

Gold Earrings

The gipsy man had been sitting loosely on the side of his cart, watching the faces. He now jumped softly down from the shaft, his knees a bit stiff. He was apparently a man something over thirty, and a beau in his way. He wore a sort of shooting-jacket, double-breasted, coming only to the hips, of dark green-and-black frieze; rather tight black trousers, black boots, and a dark green cap; with the big yellow-and-red bandanna handkerchief round his neck. His appearance was curiously elegant, and quite expensive in its gipsy style. He was handsome, too, pressing in his chin with the old, gipsy conceit, and now apparently not heeding the strangers any more, as he led his good roan horse off the road, preparing to back his cart . . .

The gipsy himself went up the steps into the newest caravan, that had its door closed. Underneath, a tied-up dog ranged forth. It was a white hound spotted liver-coloured. It gave a low growl as Leo and Bob approached.

At the same moment, a dark-faced gipsy-woman with a pink shawl or kerchief round her head and big gold earrings in her ears, came down the steps of the newest caravan, swinging her flounced, voluminous green skirt. She was handsome in a bold,

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dark, long-faced way, just a bit wolfish. She looked like one of the bold, loping Spanish gipsies.

'Good morning, my ladies and gentlemen,' she said, eyeing the girls from her bold, predative eyes. She spoke with a certain foreign stiffness. 'Good afternoon!' said the girls.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*

Clothes-pegs

The gipsies and their seven rough horses
Are back by London's boundary, between
The filling station and the traffic lights
Where grass on the verges still grows sweet and green.

Close your eyes and cross a palm with silver.
Close your doors and keep your children still.
In spite of Woolworths, buy some clothes-pegs.
For magic has crept down from over the hill.

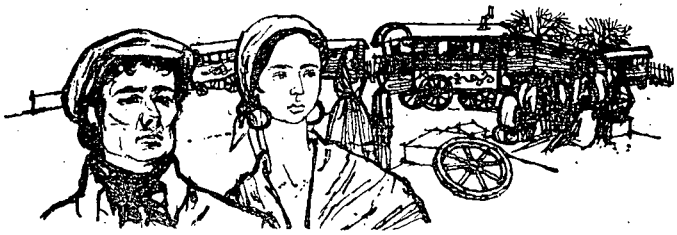
From beyond the distant filling station,
The far traffic lights, the last bus stop,
The gipsies and their seven rough horses
Have come, for magic, and sweet green grass to crop.

JOHN PUDNEY, *Lines Written on the A.20 Arterial Road*

Tea-leaves

Me, Mrs. Dai Bread Two, gipsied to kill in a silky scarlet petticoat above my knees, dirty pretty knees, see my body through my petticoat brown as a berry, high-heel shoes with one heel missing, tortoiseshell comb in my bright black slinky hair, nothing else at all but a dab of scent, lolling gaudy at the doorway, tell your fortune in the tea-leaves, scowling at the sunshine, lighting up my pipe.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Under Milk Wood*



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Gipsy's Warning

Antonio at length produced his guitar, and for the first time in his life Richard Lovell heard the savage flamenco music with all its seductive wildness. He sat at first bewildered . . .

Lobo suggested, anxious to repay his hospitality:

"You like see my girl, Manuela, dance?"

"Very much," said Richard politely.

The table was swiftly pushed to one side, and the thin, ugly little gipsy girl ran forward like one possessed into the centre of the floor, her mane of hair falling over her eyes. For a moment she paused, half-kneeling, head flung back, fingers snapping crisply, like castanets, then, with a wild effortless bound into the air, she began to dance the romális. The child leaped prodigiously high: she contorted her meagre supple body as though it were boneless and made of rubber: still snapping her fingers, she flung herself into poses so frankly and temptingly lascivious that at once she was no longer a child but a grown woman, and he felt the warm blood surging over his face and neck as he watched her entice him, feminine, amorous, elusive.

ELEANOR SMITH, *Flamenco*

When gipsy girls look deep within my hand
They always speak so tenderly and say
That I am one of those star-crossed to wed
A princess in a forest fairy-tale.
So there will be a tender gipsy princess,
My Juliet, shining through this clan.
And I would sing you of her beauty now.
And I will fight with knives the gipsy man
Who tries to steal her wild young heart away.

VACHEL LINDSAY, *I Know All This*

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GRAND SEIGNEUR

Blue lightning etched the scene
on our blinded eyes

BY YOUNGMAN CARTER

THE most infuriating experience in the world from a journalist's point of view is to sit on a story like a cork in a bottle of champagne, and never to be able to loosen your own binding wires. In this case the cork is held in position by the suffocating wax of official statements about the event, by the golden foil which in terms of cash would make it unprofitable for any witness to open his mouth, and by political wires which will be kept taut for a generation.

So, even today, I will not say, "Now it can be told," because I am no expert in science or scientific jargon to make you simple explanations. But this was the experience and the adventure as it happened to me.

A decade ago I gained my living as the Paris correspondent for several English and American journals, covering not so much news as feature stories—a far more gentlemanly occupation for a naturally lazy man. My drinking pools were, of course, the Ritz and the Scribe, and it was in this last resort that Jean Louis Vertès tackled me. It was considered pretty certain he would be the next Minister of the Interior. They came and went at that time in weeks, sometimes in days.

He was a little man, physically, with a grey parrot's quiff which he had allowed to grow rather long and artistic so that on great occasions it could be swept from his forehead when the gesture was required. He had the accent of Lyons, and a great deal of backing in that area, not only from the silk merchants.

We drank Richard. After a decent interval, when he had cleaned up a whole dish of the delicious little biscuits, he said, "I think it might interest you to be present at an experiment which is going to be performed in Touraine, at one of the châteaux: the Seigneurie, in fact. It is at the moment very secret, very confidential, you understand? If it should not prove a success, then absolute silence is essential."

"Why ask me?" I inquired. "Journalists aren't paid for keeping their traps shut. Quite the contrary."

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" Because," he said, " this is a matter in which it is important to have an independent witness. We wish to have with us a foreigner who is not of the diplomatic corps, nor especially attached to a single press organisation. A discreet man, an intelligent man who can if need be hold his tongue. And someone who is not a scientist to be blinded by theories or details."

This was a good blatant line in flattery which went a long way with me—the length of two more Richards. I must hand it to Vertès: he was a very fine performer. All expenses—a point he emphasised with finesse—would be paid, and the matter commenced itself with le Rolls-Royce which would call for me at my hotel on the afternoon of Friday next.

I was driven to the Château des Seigneurs, often called the Seigneurie, fifteen kilometres out of Blois, with speed and pomp. There were two uniformed men in front, my suitcase was handled as if it contained the Crown jewels, and the car implied, though it did not say so in number plates, immense authority. There was a small flag, veiled but conveying great prestige, and the gendarmerie saluted us on our way as if we were expected.

The château itself is the oldest in that county of châteaux, yet the most mixed in architecture. The castle at Ghent is the nearest approach, though here the turrets and the banqueting hall belong to the age of elegance.

We did not sweep, as I would have wished, to the main doorway inside the courtyard, because the cobbled area was already jammed. There were three big camions, a mobile power plant which might have been a dynamo or the energy unit for pile driving, a little crane, and innumerable packing-cases all over the place. At a guess, one would have said a television unit was moving in or that a film was about to be shot on location. A splendid, highly technical confusion reigned everywhere.

In ten minutes, I thought, this will all be clear and Her Royal Highness will declare the exhibition open.

Vertès, in black and pinstripes, but with a flowing tie to match his forelock, met me in the great hall.

" Precise to the moment," he said. " Perhaps you would agree that I should take you to taste an apéritif and to meet our colleagues on this occasion? My friend, this may prove a very great occasion. Let us be most discreet, and observe carefully all that occurs."

At this he took me by the elbow and pinched it so sharply that even I perceived that a couple of eye-openers would be quite enough. We proceeded through the stone hall, bowed forward by a butler, a very superior being with no roof to his mouth, and entered a smaller, panelled room hung with good tapestries.

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They are, fact, the historic pre-Aubusson designs, showing Le Grand Seigneur greeting Annabelle of Lorraine, open to the public at visiting hours, 250 francs.

Here was a mixed bag of men, especially as to clothes, and Vertès introduced me in such a rush that they made only a blur. I sorted them out afterwards.

One I recognised: Henri Lafourchardière, the historian, a member of the Académie who already looks like his own statue. He bowed from a great height and never spoke to me again.

Then there were M. le Prof. A., M. le Prof. B., le Comte de C., General P. de la D., the Duc de Jenesaisquoi who, it seemed, owned the place, and several others.

We all shook hands formally and nothing registered.

At the end of the row was a shabby little man still wearing a beret as if it was a skull cap: Michel Laborde, a wizened creature in a greasy, grey suit with a none too clean shirt and a thin, black tie. He had a small, shaven moustache, hardly there at all, and a blue chin.

A drink was now in my hand, and I was left standing beside him. There was a pause while he breathed garlic, tinged with another indefinable odour, across me. I opened with my usual gambit which rarely fails.

"Forgive my ignorance," I said, "but what do you do for a living?"

He cocked a bleary eye at me, a knowing eye that would have winked had it not been impeded by a nervous drag on the lower lid.

"Me?" he said. "I am the humble, commercial figure here, not one of your eminent persons. Yet, you see, they cannot do without me. All of you come to me in the end—all of you—especially the great ones."

"You must be a debt collector," I suggested, "or a money-lender?"

"Not far out," he admitted. "Not far out. I combine a little of both offices. I am in fact an embalmer, the President of the National Society of Reunited Embalmers of France, at your service."

He so shook me by this announcement that I said, rather abruptly, that I hoped never to have need of his skill, and took a second drink. He was still at my elbow, shorter and smaller than I had thought, looking up at me like a reproachful, vinous-eyed gnome.

"If it wasn't for me," he said, "and for the records of my society, none of you would be here. None of you. It was through my researches that this place was discovered and selected."

"Discovered?" I asked, thinking that historians for some

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centuries were going for nothing, according to his reckoning. "But this is one of the great châteaux of France, Le Grand Seigneur is buried here—didn't he build it?—and Gilles de Rais came here, and Louis IX, and the Eminence Grise, and even the Marquise . . ."

"Oh yes," he said, "precisely, precisely. We all know the history books. But it is I who did the research for this evening. It is I myself who have discovered the vital facts from my records about Le Grand Seigneur."

Vertès wafted me away. "That little horror!" he said. "He was essential at the beginning, and now he must perforce be here tonight, for we may need him. Come and talk to our historian —no, not Lafourchardière, but Beauregarde, the man who really knows the story."

He was a crisp, young man with curly, receding hair, an ex-chief of Intelligence to one of the Resistance Generals, a bright boy of the new psychological school.

"You know all about Le Grand Seigneur, of course," he said. "The chap I would like to know more about is L'Origon. Now there's a master whose life really *is* wrapped in mystery. Whatever happens tonight—and personally I expect nothing at all—L'Origon is the fascinating figure."

The superior butler brought me another drink, which gave me the courage to admit I'd never heard of L'Origon.

"Well, he *is* obscure," admitted Beauregarde very civilly. "Probably right out of the normal orbit. Even in Russia they're not up to his standard. You've seen Lenin in his open mausoleum recently, of course? No? Well, he's just a mess of pigmented wax, no real body at all. One good power failure in the refrigeration plant on a warm day and he'd melt away to nothing. Yet they employed the very latest methods. But L'Origon! Centuries before, and all the secrets lost! What a master!"

I was beginning to get the idea.

"He was an embalmer?"

Beauregarde elbowed me into a corner as if I was a good student who deserved further confidential encouragement. "L'Origon was another Leonardo da Vinci in his way," he said. "Not a charlatan, though he had very odd ideas about the transmutation of metals—and they may be sound, even now. He embalmed human bodies in a process of his own, God knows how, but it was perfect. The important thing is, *he preserved them intact.*"

The point of this was lost on me, so with considerable patience an explanation was made.

"Even the Egyptians preserved only the outer man—the

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insides were burnt or buried separately. L'Origon took a complete human body, exactly as the man died, and preserved it for all eternity—or at least until today. Very few examples of his work are authenticated, which is why we have that smelly little corpse-fancier Laborde with us this evening. He has some early records. We had to find a specimen who had not died by poisoning, or wounds, or anything of that sort, you see.

"The one perfect example is Le Grand Seigneur. Contrary to the legends you may have read, he was drowned here in the lake."

Le Grand Seigneur, King of Acquitaine and Lorraine and of the Realms, heir to the spirit of Charlemagne.

Here we were in his castle, standing, I calculated, almost directly above his tomb.

Beauregarde eyed me hopefully, clearly expecting a sound, logical reaction from an apt pupil.

"Then tonight," I said, "we are going to see Le Grand Seigneur exactly as he was in life. These men are going to open his tomb? What a story! I hope there is a good photographer. My God, why didn't I bring a man with me, instead of my third-rate camera?"

The young man—he was still very autumnal in colour from the deserts he had fought in—gave me a long, straight look. He broke it only to empty his glass. Then he put his head closer to mine and dropped the professional air, becoming almost a fellow conspirator.

"Tonight, my friend," he said, "if these men do what they think they are going to do, we shall not only see Le Grand Seigneur, but we shall talk to him."

"Messieurs," said the butler in the hollow, exaggerated voice of an airport loud speaker, "dinner is served."

We moved out in twos or threes to the main hall, which was chilly despite the early spring sunshine of the day. At one end, by the enormous stone fireplace which caught every draught in the room, there was a long buffet table set with cold meats, salads, and red wine.

I found myself standing next to a gloomy, middle-aged man wearing the correct, grey suit of a civil servant. He looked like a walrus who was sad because someone had shaved off his moustache; even his flapping hands suggested a melancholy chill.

I searched my memory for his name. "You are Professor Bezin, I believe? Forgive me for being so ignorant, but what is your subject?"

He gave me a sad, fishy look through old-fashioned eye-glasses

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askew on his nose. " I? " he said. " I'm of no importance here. Just a cipher in the proceedings, as usual. But I may as well boast to you, if you are to listen. I am Bezin, as you say. Henri Bezin of Grenoble. Ancient languages, you know; though I don't suppose you've ever heard of me. I'm simply here as an interpreter if the need should arise—which I very much doubt. Archaic French is my particular study. They think it may be useful. My personal opinion is that they are all mad. But I receive a fee for my services. I hope you also have a commercial interest? "

I explained that I was a stranger here myself, and had only the haziest ideas about what was going on.

" Ah," he said, and filled his mouth with cold chicken. I had half expected him to toss the morsel into the air and catch it like a sardine, but he continued, " Then you don't know all these people? "

Vertès, I said deferentially, had asked me to come as an outside observer.

" That self-seeking ogre! " said my professor. " And what will he get out of it, you ask? I will tell you. Power, publicity, fame —perhaps the control of the government. They will all get something for themselves, you'll see. Even the Duke himself, who shows his château to tourists all day for pocket money. He is the most likely to win, should anything happen."

" Why the Duke? " I asked.

He looked at me pityingly, with the cautious sadness of goldfish considering a cat. " There is publicity, of course, which he will get in any case. But if there is something in all this scientific experimenting—if something really happens—then, my friend, then . . ."

" Then what? "

" There is reputed to be great treasure here, probably in the lake. Legendary stuff, as one would expect, with very little foundation to it. Who ever heard of a king dying without a missing treasure. Ah, but here comes . . ."

Instinctively, almost magnetically, we had all turned our heads like a group of players at the entrance of the star. At the far end of the hall stood a man, consciously pausing for the perfect moment, who might well have been Hamlet himself.

He had a very large head crowned with untidy, black locks, sunken eyes which burnt, and two lines beside his mouth so deep that they resembled duelling scars. When he had our complete attention he nodded, a general bow to us all.

" In ten minutes," he said, " we shall be ready."

His voice was as deep and as cold as a rock pool.

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Then he strode over to the table, picked up some food in one hand and took Vertès by the other, moving him into a corner and whispering rapidly, privately. I watched him, as we all did, and saw that his face was powder white, with two spots of colour in his cheeks as bright as a clown's make-up. He was shaking with controlled excitement.

Bezin said, "That, as you may know if you read scientific reviews—I don't myself, but they tell me of all this—is the great Auguste Janvier himself. He is the pet scientific wonder of the age. He has kept a dead ape in cold storage for a year and restored him to life. He has extended the lives of giant tropical moths by four mating seasons. They say he has bred an ant which is as big as a poodle. And rats which—but, doubtless, you know the gossip. For myself, I see him as inhuman and repulsive. I find that he resembles a snake."

The superior butler struck a small gong, a suburban anachronism in that setting, and there was immediate silence.

Janvier took two paces forward, his fists clenched at his side and his head lowered as if about to charge.

"This experiment," he said, "is delicate to a degree. I could have wished to be allowed to conduct it in privacy, for the results and not the subject are of importance from my viewpoint. Since this cannot be the case, you will all—all of you—remain absolutely still and silent, once you are in your places. Understand, please. No smoking, no movement, no talking. If you are ready, we will descend."

He led the way through a narrow door to a spiral, stone staircase. We shuffled after him to the underground chapel of the Seigneurie, the tomb itself. It is of vaulted stone supported by thick columns, but at that moment it resembled nothing so much as a television studio. There were ropes between the columns as barriers, and we stood sheepishly behind them.

There were arc lamps, coils of cable, and disembowelled pieces of machinery and apparatus everywhere, with the subdued hum of a dynamo. Two assistants were clearly mechanical, for they wore denims and stood by a panel of switches, and two were white-robed and masked as for an operation. Janvier, now also in a white jacket, stood apart.

But these were details which the eye took in at a sweep. In the centre of the room, raised upon trestles, lay an enormous leaden coffin, very beautifully chased, its ponderous grandeur enhanced by mould and white lichen. It had clearly been lifted from the vault beneath, which was covered by planks, and the lid had already been loosened.

Janvier waited again for the moment of absolute silence. The

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two mechanics moved forward, armed with metal levers, and raised the crusted lid. It was immensely heavy, so that they slid it carefully to one side before carrying it away altogether.

Inside lay the body of an undoubted monarch, who was also a giant.

I cannot tell how best to grip this moment to the paper in words to be read in easy relaxation. It was a moment of awe in which no one drew breath.

Le Grand Seigneur lay in his coffin as lonely and as remote as a dead planet in space. His hands, yellow as old ivory, were clasped over the hilt of a naked sword, the tip of which rested between his feet. His robes were still white, his eyes were closed, and his great grey beard flowed from his jaws over his chest. He could have been sleeping a day or a thousand years.

Even Janvier stood beside him as if petrified, and the two mechanics became rigid and grotesque, their backs half straightened after the weight of the lid, as if a film had suddenly stopped in the middle of a scene. Only the dynamos maintained their throb like a protracted, inevitable headache.

Finally Janvier made a gesture, and little Laborde the embalmer teetered forward. He stood for some time giving the body a long professional stare. Then he bent over the coffin and touched the forehead, the hair, and the hands. The spell was broken, but a sense of unease had me in a cold vice. Apart from the protagonists we all stood motionless.

The whole scene was enacted in silence, and it was clear it had been carefully discussed beforehand. Laborde, satisfied that some particular requirement of his trade had been fulfilled, stood back. Four pairs of hands raised the upper part of the rigid figure and slid a board beneath the body so that it lay tilted, three parts out of the sarcophagus. A piece of fragile drapery broke off and fell to the floor, and some yellow fragments of twigs dropped to nothing, revealing a stain on the white robes, the imprint of a withered funeral wreath.

Now it was Janvier's turn to satisfy himself. The others stood apart as he lowered his head. In just such a way I have seen a pianist bow over a keyboard before striking the first chord. Then he spread out his arms and snapped his fingers, the first sound in the vault to rise above the muffled rhythm of the dynamos.

His two white-coated assistants brought him belts of grey flexible material to which wire cables were attached. These he wound round the forehead, the hands, the feet, and the chest; and as he did so the burial clothes broke into frail cobwebs. The massive dignity of that gigantic figure survived these insults.

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When it was all done he made a sign. A man at the switchboard turned a dial. The throb of the dynamos rose by a semitone. Needles on the board began to flicker. To the layman it was like watching the cockpit of an airliner when the pilot is engaged in a tricky manœuvre.

Janvier stood for several minutes beside him, one hand on the man's shoulder. Then he returned to the body. The rhythm became intolerable in its dull urgency.

Beauregarde, the historian, was standing beside me, though until this moment I had not noticed him. In all this suspense no one had stirred, but suddenly he leaned forward and crossed himself, a reflex gesture which was involuntary. " Mother of Heaven," he said, " he—it—Le Seigneur—is sweating."

It was true. A waxen surface on the body was melting. A deeper colour had returned to the ivory face, and with it a moisture trickled from the forehead.

Janvier, his hands gripping the leaden edge of the coffin, drew up to his full height. He made a swift gesture to the white-coated men with him, and they laid their hands upon the body in unison. Artificial respiration.

To and fro, on and on. Pieces of white burial cloth began to float like feathers to the stone floor.

At last they stopped and the two with him stood back. The whir of dynamos, still a pain rather than a sound, rose again.

Then it happened.

We all saw it, all of us, and it was a terrible moment.

The body shuddered. The great chest, with its mat of grey hair, now three parts bare in its feathery rags, gave an enormous convulsive heave. It was alive.

Again Janvier gestured to the switches, and the throb rose almost out of earshot.

Another breath, and another. The whole carcase writhed. If there is feeling in this frightening, moving creature, I thought, it can only be intense pain. This is torture in a modern, clinical, hygienic pit of Acheron, an eighth circle undreamt of by Dante.

We who watched made a strange animal noise between us, a compound of " No," and " Enough," and " Spare us all for the love of God."

The two spots of colour on Janvier's cheeks burnt bright as paint, and his eye sockets might have been dark glasses with polished jet boot buttons in the centre. For the first time he spoke to the man at the controls, " Group two to five thousand," he said, " and all you can make on three and four."

To me he seemed the incarnation of merciless power and

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obscene curiosity, driving into a secret beyond human acceptance.

Slowly, jerkily, like an enormous marionette, Le Grand Seigneur arched his back and the huge chest, every rib and muscle quivering, expanded to its zenith. Now he was bolt upright on his haunches, the sword still between his hands.

And now his eyes were open. They were china blue, without focus, staring straight ahead like the eyes of a doll.

From his forehead, his chest, and his hands the dangling wires drummed their infernal life force into him. An intensity of pain wracked me as if the currents were passing through my own body.

His brows contracted and his eyes darkened as if he was staring directly into the sun. He can see, I thought. Now he can see us all, in the miserable shame of our puerile curiosity.

He did not turn his head, but his eyes moved. Yet he was still unreal, and the suggestion of a great marionette was enhanced by the trailing wires. I saw his hands tighten and change their grip on the sword; slowly, jerkily, he raised it in a long arc until it was held directly above his head. Then he spoke.

It was a deep, rasping voice like a gramophone record played too slowly through an echo chamber, each particle of sound separated from its fellow. I did not need Bezin's gift of tongues to understand.

" *Who breaks my dream?* "

There was complete silence. None of us dared answer. But Janvier took a half-pace forward, one arm outstretched to the instrument panel like a conductor sustaining a single note.

The flash of blue lightning followed by utter darkness came almost as a relief. It etched the scene on our blinded eyes for a long moment and indeed for a lifetime.

At last one of the engineers shouted, " Master switch! Quick, the battery set! " There was scuffling and voices crying, " Candles! " " New fuses." " Everyone still, please."

A pocket lighter made a pinpoint, then the beam of a torch swept the stone columns, and finally a single, naked bulb in the roof moved coldly into being. It was the last tableau in the whole nightmare, and again every movement was arrested as the picture cleared, sharp and chill, on cobweb and stone, black silhouette, tangled wire, and moulded lead.

The Seigneur lay inert, half in and half out of the sarcophagus. He had returned to his long sleep, and this time it would surely be for all eternity. The skin was parchment stretched over bone, taut and rigid as a winter leaf which would soon be dust.

Only the sword between his hands retained its reality, blackened silver and tarnished steel. But it was still a sword, and the blade was crimson bright with blood. From the black shadows on the

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flagstones into the central pool of light and into darkness again there was a slow, glimmering stream which found the crevices, absorbed them, and flowed on.

Janvier. Not the scientist, the brain which was mastering the secrets of time, but a crumpled hulk in a white coat blotched with dust and spattered scarlet, with ridiculous patent leather shoes and a sagging black sock, an enemy killed by the single sweep of a sword on a battlefield of his own choosing.

We reached the upper room with what dignity was left to us. Our cheeks were grey and each man stood apart from his neighbour, glancing covertly, trying to read if his own face was as scarred and shrivelled as those about him.

Vertès moved to the table like a sleepwalker and poured cognac, spilling half of it over the cloth. One by one we followed him.

Beauregarde, standing nearest to me, mumbled out of a dream which was glazing his eyes. " He said, ' None shall pass.' His motto, you know. His rallying cry. It is on the coat of arms."

Bezin heard him and shook his head. " No," he said. " The words were quite distinct. What he said was, ' I am not mocked,' or something very like it."

None of us has ever been disposed to argue the point.

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★ ★ ★

HEADSTRONG WIFE

We had transferred our lodgings from Regent Square to the top floor of the Harlequin at 50, Beak Street. Though we were very happy, my wife and I had some quarrels since my ideas of marriage are old-fashioned about wifely obedience and in many ways she regarded me as a mere child because of being hardly out of my teens. But any marriage in which a woman wears the pants is an unseemly farce. To shake up her illusions I hung her out of the fourth-floor window of our room so that she should get some respect for me.

This worked wonders for she gazed, head-downwards, up at the stars till the police from their H.Q. on the opposite side of Beak Street started yelling at me to pull her back.

She had not uttered a single word, and when I shouted pleasantly across the street: " We are only practising our act, aren't we, Kid? " she replied " Yes," as calmly and happily as if we did it every ten minutes.

The police then left us alone, saying: " Well, don't practise it so high up over other people's heads, please."

ROY CAMPBELL, *Light on a Dark Horse*

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★ *The date : September, 1943. The place : Ventotene, at moonset. A boat slips towards the dark shore . . .*

In this vivid, laconic account taken from his on-the-spot wartime dispatches, expert novelist John Steinbeck (brilliant author of Cannery Row, Of Mice and Men, East of Eden) conveys easily, incisively in simple words clear as cold steel, the taut impact of naval action, and the fearsome thrill of those tense, drab moments of waiting—for the enemy.

A NIGHT ON VENTOTENE

BY JOHN STEINBECK

December 3, 1943—The units of the naval task force made their rendezvous at sea and at dusk, and set off at calculated speed to be at the island of Ventotene at moonset. The moon was very large and it was not desirable that the people on the island should know what force was coming against them, consequently the attack was not to be attempted until the darkness came. The force spread out in its travelling formation and moved slowly over the calm sea.

On a destroyer of the force, the paratroopers who were to make the assault sat on the deck and watched the moon. They seemed a little uneasy. After being trained to drop in from the sky their first action was to be a seagoing one. Perhaps their sense of fitness was outraged.

All along the Italian coast the air force was raiding. The naval force could see the flares parachuting down and the burst of explosives and the lines of tracers off to the right. But the coast was kept too busy for anyone to bother with the little naval force heading northwards.

The timing was exact. The moon turned very red before it set; and just as it set the high hump of the island showed against its face. The moment it had set the darkness was thick so that you could not see the man standing at your shoulder.

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There were no lights on the island at all. This island had been blacked out for three years.

When the naval force had taken its positions a small boat equipped with a loud speaker crept in towards the beach. From five hundred yards offshore it beamed its loud speaker on the darkened town, and a terrible voice called its proclamation.

Italians, you must now surrender. We have come in force. Your German ally has deserted you. You have fifteen minutes to surrender. Display three white lights for surrender. At the end of fifteen minutes we will open fire. This will be repeated once more.

And then the night was silent.

On the bridge of a destroyer the officers peered at the darkness in the direction of the island. At the ship's rails the men looked off into the darkness. The executive officer kept looking at his wristwatch, and the night was so dark that the illuminated dial could be seen six feet away.

Gun control had the firing data ready. The guns of the whole force were trained on the island. And the minutes went slowly.

No one wanted to fire on the town, to turn the concentrated destruction of high explosive on the dark island. But the minutes dragged interminably on, ten—eleven—twelve. The green, glowing hands moved on the face of the wristwatch.

The captain spoke a word into his phone, and there was a rustle and the door of the plotting-room opened and closed.

And then, as the minute hand crawled over fourteen minutes, three white rockets went up from the island. They flowed upward and curved lazily over and fell back. And then, not content, three more went up.

The captain sighed with relief and spoke again into his phone. And the whole ship seemed to relax.

In the wardroom the commodore of the task force sat at the head of the table. He was dressed in khaki, his shirt open at the throat and his sleeves rolled up. He wore a helmet, and a tommy-gun lay on the table in front of him.

" I'll go in and take the surrender," he said, and he called the names of five men to go with him.

" The paratroopers are to come in as soon as you can get them in the landing boat," he said to the executive officer. " Lower the whaleboat."

The deck was very dark. You had to feel your way along.

The boat davits were swung out as they always are in action, and now a crew was lowering the whaleboat. They held it at deck level for the men to get in—a coxswain and an engineer were already in the boat.

Five officers, armed with submachine-guns, clambered over

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the rail and settled themselves. Each man had a drum of bullets on his gun and each one wore a pouch which carried another drum.

The boat lowered away, and just as it touched the water the engineer started the engine.

The boat cast off and turned towards the shore. It was pretty much a job of guesswork because you could not see the shore.

The commodore said, "We've got to get in and disarm them before they change their minds. Can't tell what they'll do if we give them time." And he said to his men, "Don't take any chances. Open fire if anyone shows the slightest sign of resisting."

The boat slipped towards the dark shore, her motors muffled and quiet.

December 6, 1943—The main harbour of Ventotene is a narrow inlet that ends against a cliff like an amphitheatre, and on this semicircular cliff the town stands high above the water. To the left of this inlet there is a pier and a little breakwater, unconnected with the land and designed to keep the swells from breaking on the pier; and finally to the left of the pier there is another inlet very like the true harbour which, however, is no harbour at all.

The whaleboat with the five men in it approached the dark island, and when it was close to the shore the commander shone a flashlight quickly, and it showed a deep inlet. He thought this was a harbour, and the little boat coasted easily into it. Then the light flashed on again and ranged about, only to discover that this was not the true harbour at all but the false inlet.

The whaleboat put about and headed out again, and soon it came to what looked like a sand bar stuck out of the water. And again the light flashed out, and it was seen that it was a breakwater.

Again the boat proceeded, but approximately ten minutes had been consumed in being slightly lost. The third try was successful, and the little boat found the entrance of the true harbour and nosed into it.

Just as the whaleboat put its head into the little harbour an explosion came from behind the breakwater, and there was the sound of running feet, and then from the top of the cliff there came another big explosion, and then progressively back on the hill more and more blasts.

There was nothing to do then but to go ahead. The whaleboat plunged into the pier and the five men leapt out.

Behind the breakwater lay a German E-boat and beside her stood a German soldier. He had just thrown a potato-masher grenade at the E-boat to destroy and sink her. One of the

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American officers ran at him, and with one motion the German ripped out his Luger pistol and tossed it in the water and then put both of his hands over his head. The glancing light of a powerful flashlight circled him. The officer who had taken him rushed him to the whaleboat and put him under guard of the boat's engineer.

Now a crowd of Italians came swarming down from the hill, crying, " Surrender, surrender! " And as they came they dropped their rifles on the ground in an unholy heap.

The commodore pointed to a place on the quay. " Stack them there," he said. " Get everything you have and stack it right there."

Now the landing was crisscrossed with lights. The five Americans stood side by side with their guns ready, while the Italian carabinieri brought their guns and put them in a pile.

Everyone seemed to be confused and glad and frightened. The people wanted to crowd close to see the Americans, and at the same time the ugly pig snouts of the tommy-guns warned them back. It is not reassuring to be one of five men who are ostensibly holding a line against two hundred and fifty men, even if those men seem to have surrendered.

Every one of the Italians was talking. No one was listening. And no one wanted to listen. Then breaking through their ranks came a remarkable figure: a tall, grey-haired, old man dressed in pink pyjamas. He stalked through the chattering, shouting ranks of the carabinieri and he said, " I speak English."

Immediately the shouting stopped, and the ring of faces showed intensely in the flashlight beams.

" I have been a political prisoner here for three years," the old man said. For some reason he did not seem funny in his pink pyjamas. He had a great dignity, even enough to offset his costume.

The commodore asked, " What were those explosions? "

" The Germans," the old man said. " There are eighty-seven of them. They were set up with machine-guns to fire on you when you entered the harbour, but when you landed troops in the false harbour and when you landed more troops on the breakwater they thought they might be surrounded, so they retreated. They are dynamiting as they go."

" When we landed troops? " the commodore began, and then he shut himself off. " Oh yes. I see," he said. " Yes, when we landed troops."

One of the officers shivered and grinned at the commodore. " I wish those paratroopers would come in about now," he said.

" I wouldn't mind it, either," the commodore replied. And

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he went on to the old man in the pyjamas, " Where will the Germans go? "

" They'll go to their radar station to destroy it. Then they have some entrenchments on the hill. I think they will try to hold them there."

And at that moment there came a very large explosion and a fire started back on the hill, a fire large enough to illuminate the little dock and the entrance to the bay. " That will be the radar station now," the old man said. " They are very thorough. Too bad the troops you landed didn't get there first."

" Yes," said the commodore, " isn't it? "

More Italians came down the hill then and deposited their arms. They seemed to be very glad to let them go. Apparently they had never loved their guns very much.

On the dock the five Americans stood uneasily; the safety-catches were off their guns, and their eyes moved restlessly among the Italians. The firelight from the burning buildings on the hill made deep shadows at the back of the dock houses.

The commodore said softly, " I wish those paratroopers would get here. If Jerry finds out there are only five of us, I wouldn't give any odds on us."

And then there was a sound of a boat's motor and the commodore smiled with relief. The forty-three paratroopers were coming in to the shore. " Give them a light, coxswain," the commander called. " Show them where to come."

December 8, 1943—The five men from the destroyer moved restlessly about the quay on the island of Ventotene which they had accidentally, and with five kinds of luck, captured. The paratroopers did not arrive. There was no sign from the destroyer standing offshore, and minutes got to be hours.

The dark town on the cliff became peopled with imaginary snipers, and back on the hill where the Germans had retreated an occasional explosion roared as they blasted more installations. They didn't know how many Americans there were, and there were five; and the Americans did know how many Germans there were, and there were eighty-seven. This was very largely in favour of the Americans, because if the Germans had known— It is not a nice thing to dwell on.

There is no way of knowing how long it took for those forty-three paratroopers to get ashore. It may have been half an hour and it may have been three hours. It felt to the five men ashore like three days. Probably it was about forty-five minutes.

The dark, hostile island and the dark water gave no comfort. But after an interminable time there was a secret little mutter of

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engines. Then out in the dark there was a little flutter of light. The boat was asking for directions.

One of the officers on the quay got down on his stomach and leaned over the stone parapet and signalled back with his flashlight so that it could not be seen from the island. And at intervals he flashed his torch to guide the boat.

It came out of the dark abruptly: out of the pitch dark it slipped noiselessly and bumped gently against the quay. And it was one of those boats even the name of which the Navy will cut out if I put it in, but the important thing was that there were forty-three paratroopers on board. They seemed to flow over the side; they were very quiet.

Their captain went to work instantly. He sent out pickets before he had been one minute ashore, and they slipped away up the hill to guard the approaches to the harbour. Some crept up into the town, armed with their rifles and grenades, and they occupied the tops of buildings, and others went down to the beaches to watch the seaward approaches. Meanwhile a little gangplank was ashore, and the supplies were coming down on to the quay in the darkness.

In the middle of this work there was a growl of a plane overhead. The captain of paratroopers gave a curt order and the men took cover. The plane droned over, and as it got offshore again the destroyer burst into action. She flamed like a flowerpot at an old-fashioned Fourth of July firework display. Her tracers spread like a fountain. And then she was dark again and the plane was gone.

The unloading continued until there was a pile of goods on the quay, rations in cases and boxes of ammunition and machine-guns and the light sleeping-rolls of the paratroopers. They did not bring any luxuries with them. They never do. Food and ammunition are their main interests. They get along with very little else.

But on Ventotene they brought water, too, in those handled containers which are used for both water and gasolene. For Ventotene has no water. In other times water barges came out from the mainland. The only local water is that caught in cisterns during the rainy months.

When the supplies were landed the paratrooper officers and the naval officers gathered in a little stone building on the waterfront. And an electric lantern was on the floor and the doors and windows were shut so that no line of light could show out. The faces were lit from below, and they were strained faces with the jaw muscles pulled tight.

The maps were out again.

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" I'm not going to throw my men against a bigger force in the dark," the captain of paratroopers said. " Jerry will be trenched by now. I'm not going to move until morning. We've only got half as many men and no artillery."

A lieutenant said, " Maybe—maybe we could talk them out of it. Let's have some of the Italians in and see what we can do. The Jerry doesn't know how many men we have or how many ships. Let's think about that a little. It's just barely possible we could talk them out of it."

" How? " the captain asked.

" Well, would you let me go up with a white flag in the morning? "

" They'd bump you."

" Would you let me try? "

" Well—"

" Might save a lot of trouble—sir."

" We can't afford to lose officers."

" You won't lose me. Just give me a nod."

The captain looked at him for a long time and then he smiled thinly and his head dipped almost imperceptibly.

December 10, 1943—The lieutenant walked slowly up the hill towards the German positions. He carried his white flag over his head, and his white flag was a bath towel.

As he walked he thought what a fool he was. He had really stuck his neck out. Last night when he had argued for the privilege of going up and trying to kid the Jerry into surrender he hadn't known it would be like this. He hadn't known how lonely and exposed he would be.

Forty paratroopers against eighty-seven Jerries, but Jerry didn't know that. The lieutenant also hoped Jerry wouldn't know his guts were turned to water. His feet sounded loud on the path.

It was early in the morning and the sun was not up yet. He hoped they could see his white flag. Maybe it would be invisible in this light. He kept in the open as much as possible as he climbed the hill.

He knew that the forty paratroopers were crawling and squirming behind him, keeping cover, getting into position so that if anything should go wrong they might attack and stand some chance of surprising the Jerry. He knew the fieldglasses of the captain would be on the German position, waiting for something to happen.

" If they shoot at you, flop and lie still," the captain had said. " We'll try to cover you and get you out."

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The lieutenant knew that if he were hit and not killed he would hear the shot after he was hit, but if he was hit in the head he wouldn't hear or feel anything. He hoped, if it happened, it would happen that way.

His feet seemed very heavy and clumsy. He looked down and saw the little stones on the path, and he wished he could get down on his knees to see what kind of stones they were. He had a positive hunger to get down out of line.

His chest tingled almost as if he were preparing to receive the bullet. And his throat was as tight as it had been once when he tried to make a speech in college.

Step by step he drew nearer, and there was no sign from Jerry. The lieutenant wanted to look back to see whether any of the paratroopers were in sight, but he knew the Germans would have their fieldglasses on him, and they were close enough so that they could even see his expression.

It happened finally, quickly and naturally. He was passing a pile of rocks when a deep voice shouted an order to him.

There were three Germans, young-looking men, and they had their rifles trained on his stomach.

He stopped and stared at them, and they stared back. He wondered whether his eyes were as wide as theirs. They paused, and then a hoarse voice called from up ahead. The Jerries stood up and they glanced quickly down the hill before they came out to him. And then the four marched on.

It seemed a little silly to the lieutenant, like small boys marching up an alley to attack Connor's woodshed. And his bath towel on a stick seemed silly, too.

He thought, Well, anyway, if they bump me our boys will get these three. In his mind's eye he could see helmeted Americans watching the little procession through their rifle sights.

Ahead was a small, white, stone building, but Jerry was too smart to be in the building. A trench started behind it, and led down to a hole almost like a shell hole.

Three officers faced him in the hole. They were dressed in dusty blue and they wore the beautiful, high caps of the Luftwaffe with silver eagles and swastikas. They were electronics engineers, a ground service for the German Air Force.

They faced him without speaking, and his throat was so tight that for a moment he could not begin. All he could think of was a green table; Jerry had three deuces showing and the lieutenant a pair of treys. He knew they had no more, but they didn't know what his hole card was. He only hoped they wouldn't know, because all he had was that pair of treys.

The Oberleutnant regarded him closely and said nothing.

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"Do you speak English?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes."

The lieutenant took a deep breath and spoke the piece he had memorised.

"The colonel's compliments, sir; I am ordered to demand your surrender. At the end of twenty minutes the cruisers will move up and open fire unless ordered otherwise following your surrender." He noticed the Oberleutnant's eyes involuntarily move towards the sea.

The lieutenant lapsed out of his formality, as he had planned. "What's the good?" he said. "We'll just kill you all. We've got six hundred men ashore and the cruisers are aching to take a shot at you. What's the good of it? You'd kill some of us and we'd kill all of you. Why don't you just stack your arms and come in?"

The Oberleutnant stared into his eyes. He had seen the same look over the green table. That what's-in-the-hole look. The look balanced: call or toss in, call or toss in.

The pause was centuries long, and then at last, "What treatment will we receive?" the Oberleutnant asked.

"Prisoners of war under Convention of The Hague." The lieutenant was trying desperately to show nothing in his face.

There was another long pause.

The German breathed in deeply and his breath whistled in his nose.

"It is no dishonour to surrender to superior forces," he said.

December 13, 1943—When the lieutenant went up to the Germans with his bath towel for a white flag, the captain of paratroopers, peering through a crack between two buildings, watched him go. The men hidden below saw the lieutenant challenged, and then they saw him led behind the white, stone building. The watching men hardly breathed then. They were waiting for the crack of a rifle shot that would mean the plan for kidding the Germans into surrender had failed. The time went slowly. Actually, it was only about fifteen minutes.

Then the lieutenant appeared again and this time he was accompanied by three German officers.

The watchers saw him walk down to a clear place in the path and there pause and point to the ground. Then two of the officers retired behind the white building again. But in a moment they reappeared, and behind them came the German soldiers. They straggled down the path and, at the place that had been indicated, they piled their arms, their rifles and machine-guns, and even their pistols.

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The captain, lying behind his stones, watched and counted. He tallied the whole eighty-seven men who were supposed to be there. He said to his lieutenant, "By God, he pulled it off!"

And now a little pageant developed. As the Germans marched down the path, American paratroopers materialised out of the ground beside them, until they were closely surrounded by a guard of honour of about thirty men. The whole group swung down the path and into the little white town that stood so high above the harbour of Ventotene.

Since Ventotene had been for hundreds of years an Italian prison island, there was no lack of place to put the prisoners. The top floor of what we would call a city hall was a big roomy gaol with four or five big cells.

The column marched up the steps of the city hall and on up to the third floor, and then the Germans were split into three groups. One group was put into each of three cells, while the fourth cell was reserved for the officers. Then guards with tommy-guns were posted at the doors of the cells, and the conquest was over.

The lieutenant who had carried the white flag sat down on the steps of the city hall a little shakily. The captain sat down beside him. "Any trouble?" the captain asked.

"No. It was too easy. I don't believe it yet." He lit a cigarette, and his shaking hand nearly put out the match.

"Wonderful job," the captain said. "But what are we going to do with them?"

"Won't the ships be back tonight?"

"I hope so, but suppose they don't get back? We can't let anybody get any sleep until we get rid of these babies."

A trooper lounged near. "Those Jerry officers are raising hell," he said. "They want to see the commanding officer, sir."

The captain stood up. "Better come with me," he told the lieutenant. "How many men did you tell them we had?"

"Six hundred," the lieutenant said, "and I forget how many cruisers offshore."

The captain laughed. "One time I heard about an officer who marched fifteen men round a house until they looked like an army. Maybe we better do that with our forty."

At the door of the officers' cell the captain took out his pistol and handed it to one of the guards. "Leave the door open and keep your eye on us all the time. If they make a suspicious move, shoot them!"

"Yes, sir," said the guard, and he unlocked and opened the heavy door.

The German officers were at the barred window, looking

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down on the deserted streets of the little town. They could see two lonely sentries in front of the building. The German Oberleutnant turned as the captain entered. "I demand to see the colonel," he said.

The captain swallowed. "Er—the colonel? Well, he is engaged."

For a long moment the German stared into the captain's eyes. Finally he said, "You are the commanding officer, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," the captain said.

"How many men have you?"

"We do not answer questions," the captain said stiffly.

The German's face was hard and disappointed. He said, "I don't think you have six hundred men. I think you have only a few more than thirty men."

The captain nodded solemnly. He said, "We've mined the building. If there is any trouble—any trouble at all—we'll blow the whole mess of you to hell." He turned to leave the cell. "You'll be taken aboard ship soon now," he said over his shoulder.

Going down the stairs, the lieutenant said, "Have you really mined the building?"

The captain grinned at him. "Have we really got six hundred men?" he asked.

And then he said, "Lord, I hope the destroyer gets in tonight to take these babies out. None of us is going to get any sleep till then."

© 1943, 1958 by John Steinbeck

"Africa just isn't what it used to be!"

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LOVE IN A WYCH-ELM

Everybody makes love when they are married

BY H. E. BATES

WHEN I was a boy the Candleton sisters, seven of them, lived in a large, gabled house built of red brick that gave the impression of having been muted by continual sunlight to a pleasant shade of orange-rose. The front face of it had a high, benign, open appearance and I always felt that the big sash windows actually smiled down on the long gravel terrace, the iron pergola of roses, and the sunken tennis lawn.

At the back were rows of stables, all in the same faded and agreeable shade of brick, with lofts that were full of insecure and ancient bedsteads, fireguards, hip-baths, tennis rackets, croquet hammers, rocking-horses, muscle-developers, Indian clubs, travelling-trunks, and things of that sort thrown out by Mr. and Mrs. Candleton over the course of their fruitful years.

I was never very sure of what Mr. Candleton did in life; I was not even sure in fact if he did anything at all except to induce Mrs. Candleton, at very regular intervals, to bear another daughter. In a town like Evensford there were at that time very few people of independent means who lived in houses that had stables at the back. The Candletons were, or so it seemed to me, above our station.

There was at one time a story that Mr. Candleton was connected with wine. I could well believe this. Like his house, Mr. Candleton's face had toned to a remarkably pleasant shade of inflammable rose. This always seemed perhaps brighter than it really was because his eyes were so blue. They were of that rare shade of pale violet-blue that always seems about to dissolve, especially in intoxication. This effect was still further heightened by hair of a most pure, distinguished shade of yellow: a thick, oat-straw yellow that was quite startling and remarkable in a male.

All the Candleton sisters, too, had their father's pale violet, dissolving eyes and that exceptional shade of oat-straw hair.

At first, when they were very small children, it was white and

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silky. Then as they grew up, its characteristic, shining straw colour grew stronger. A stranger seeing them for the first time would have said that they were seven dolls who had been dipped in a solution of something several shades paler than saffron. The hair was very beautiful when brushed, and as children they all wore it long.

On hot days in summer Mr. Candleton wore cream flannel trousers with a blue pinstripe in them, a blazer with red and orange stripes, and a straw hat with a band of the same design. Round his waist he had a red silk cummerbund. All his shirts were of silk, and he wore them buttoned at the neck.

In winter he chose things like Donegal tweeds: roughish, sporting, oatmeal affairs that were just right for his grained, waterproof, shooting brogues. He wore smart, yellow gloves and a soft, tweed hat with a little feather in the band. He always seemed to be setting off somewhere, brisk and dandyish and correct, a man of leisure with plenty of time to spare.

It was quite different with Mrs. Candleton. The house was big and rambling and it might well have been built specially to accommodate Mrs. Candleton, who was like a big, absentminded, untidy, roving bear. My mother used to say that she got up and went to bed in a pinafore. It wasn't a very clean pinafore, either. Nor were her paper haircurlers, which were sometimes still in her rough, unruly, black hair at tea-time. She always seemed to be wearing carpet-slippers, and often her stockings would be slipping down. She was a woman who constantly seemed to be catching up with life and was always a day and a half behind.

The fact was, I suppose, that with seven children in something like a dozen years Mrs. Candleton was still naturally hazy in some of her diurnal calculations. Instead of her catching up with life, life was catching up with her.

Meals, for example, made the oddest appearances in the Candleton household. If I went on a school-less day to call on Stella—she was the one exactly of my own age, the one I knew best—it was either to find breakfast being taken at eleven-thirty, with Mr. Candleton always immaculate behind the silver toast-rack and Mrs. Candleton looking like the jaded mistress of a rag-and-bone man, or dinner at half past three, or tea at seven.

In a town like Evensford everybody was rigidly governed by factory hours and the sound of factory hooters. At various times of the day silences fell on the town that were a hushed indication that all honest people were decently at work. All this meant that breakfast was at seven, dinner at twelve-thirty, and tea at half past five. That was how everybody ate and lived

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and ran their lives in Evensford; everybody, that is, except the Candletons.

These characteristics of excessive and immediate smartness on the one hand, and the haircurler and pinafore style on the other, had been bequeathed by her and Mr. Candleton in almost exactly equal measure to their children. The girls were all beautiful, all excessively dressy as they grew up and, as my mother was fond of saying, not over-clean.

"If they get a cat-lick once a week, it's about as much as they do get," was one of her favourite sayings.

But children do not notice such things very acutely, and I cannot say that I myself was much interested in the virtues of soap and water. What I liked about the Candletons was not only a certain mysterious quality of what I thought was aristocracy but a feeling of untamed irresponsibility.

They were effervescent. When the eldest girl, Lorna, was seventeen she ran off with a captain in the Royal Artillery who turned out to be a married man.

I thought it might well have been the sort of thing that would have ruined a girl, temporarily at least, in Evensford, but Stella simply thought it a wild joke and said, "She had a wonderful time. It was gorgeous. They stayed at a marvellous hotel in London. She told us all about it. I thought Mother would die laughing."

Of laughing, not shame: that was typical of the Candleton standard, the Candleton approach, and the Candleton judgment on such things.

The four eldest girls, two of them twins, were called Lorna, Hilda, Rosa, and Freda. This habit of giving names ending in the same letter went on to Stella—with whom I played street-games in winter in front of the gas-lit windows of a pork-pie and sausage shop, and games in summer in the Candleton garden and among the muscle-developers and bedsteads of the Candleton loft—and then on to the two youngest, who were mere babies as I knew them, Wanda and Eva.

Mrs. Candleton's Christian name was Blanche, which suited her perfectly.

It was a common tendency in all the Candleton girls to develop swiftly. At thirteen they were filling out; at fifteen they were splendidly and handsomely buxom and were doing up their hair. Hilda appeared to me to be a goddess of marbled form long before she was eighteen and got engaged to a beefy, young farmer, who bred prize cattle and called for her in a long, open, sports car.

Hilda had another characteristic, not shared by any of the rest

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of the family except her mother. She sang rather well. At eighteen she began to have her pleasant, throaty, contralto voice trained. Mr. Candleton was a strict Sunday morning churchgoer in pinstripe trousers, bowler hat, and spats, and Hilda went with him to sing in the choir.

Her voice was trained by a Mr. Lancaster, a rather bumptious pint-size tenor who gave her lessons three evenings a week. It was generally known that Mr. Lancaster was, as a singer at any rate, past his best, but it was not long before the engagement between Hilda and the farmer was broken.

At that time Stella and I were nine. I, at least, was nine; and Stella, physically, was twelve or thirteen. What I liked about her so much in those days was her utter freedom to come and go as she pleased. Other children had errands to run, confirmation classes to attend, catechisms to learn, aunts to visit, restrictive penances like shoes to clean, or knives to rub up with bath-brick.

In the Candleton way she had never anything to do but play, enjoy herself, indulge in inconsequential make-believe, and teach me remarkable things about life and living.

"What shall we do? Let's be married. Let's go up to the loft and be married."

"We were married the day before yesterday."

"That doesn't matter. You can be married over and over again. Hilda's going to be. Come on, let's be married."

"All right. But not in the loft. Let's have a new house this time."

"All right. Let's be married in the wych-elm."

The Candleton garden extended beyond the stables into a rough orchard of old damson trees, with a few crooked espalier pears. A pepperpot summerhouse in rustic work with a thatched roof stood in one corner, almost obliterated by lilac trees. In summer damsons and pears fell into the deep grass and no one picked them up. A sense of honeyed, rotting quietness spread under the lurching trees and was compressed and shut in by a high boundary line of old, tapering wych-elms.

Rooks nested in the highest of the elms, and when summer thickened the branches the trees were like a wall. The house was hidden and shut away. On a heavy summer day you would hear nothing there but the sound of rooks musing and croaking and fruit falling with a squashy, mellow plop on the grass and paths.

Up in the wych-elms the peculiar structure of boughs made a house for us. We could walk about it. We crawled, like monkeys, from tree to tree. In this paradise we stayed for entire afternoons, cocooned with scents, hidden away in leaves. We made tea in ancient saucepans on flameless fires of elm twigs, and prepared

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dinners of potatoes and gravy from fallen pears. And up here, on a soft August afternoon, we were married without witnesses; and Stella, with her yellow hair done up for the first time, wore a veil of lace curtains and carried a bunch of cow-parsley.

But before that happened I had caught only the day before, another glimpse of the Candleton way of living.

I had called about six o'clock in the evening for Stella, but although the door of the house was open, nobody, for some time at any rate, answered my ring at the bell. That was not at all unusual for the Candleton household. Although it never seemed possible for nine such unmistakable people to disappear without trace, it was frequently happening, and often I went to the door and rang until I was tired of ringing and then went away without an answer.

I remember once ringing the bell and then, tired of it, peeping into the kitchen. It was one of those big, old-fashioned kitchens with an enormous, iron cooking range with plate racks above it and gigantic dressers and vast fish-kettles and knife-cleaners everywhere. In the middle of it all Mrs. Candleton sat asleep. Not normally asleep, I could see. A quarter-full bottle of something for which I had no definition stood on the table in front of her, together with a glass, and beside the glass, most astonishing thing of all, her false teeth.

Blowsily, frowsily, comfortably, toothlessly, Mrs. Candleton was sleeping away the afternoon in her haircurlers and her pinafore.

But on the evening I called for Stella the kitchen was empty. I rang the bell four or five times and then, getting no answer, stepped into the hall.

"Hullo," someone said.

That very soft, whispered, throaty voice was Hilda's. She was standing at the top of the stairs. She was wearing her petticoat, and her feet were bare. In her hands she was holding a pair of stockings, which she had evidently been turning inside out in readiness to put on.

"Oh, it's you," she said. "I thought I heard someone."

"Is Stella here?"

"They're all out. They've all gone to the Robinsons' for tea. It's Katie's birthday."

"Oh! I see," I said. "Well, I'll come again tomorrow—"

"I'm just going to a dance," she said. "Would you like to see my dress? Would you? Come on, come up."

Standing in the bedroom, with the August sunlight shining on her bare shoulders, through the lace of her slip, and on her

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sensational yellow Candleton hair, she was a magnificent figure of a girl.

"Just let me put my stockings on, and then you can see my dress."

She sat down on the bed to put on her stockings. Her legs were smooth and heavy. I experienced an odd sensation as the stockings unrolled up her legs, and then were fastened somewhere underneath the petticoat. Then she stood up and looked at the back of her legs to see if her stockings were straight. After that she smoothed the straps of her petticoat over her shoulders and said, "Just wait till I give my hair one more brush."

I shall never forget how she sat before the dressing mirror and brushed her hair. I was agreeably and mystically stunned. The strokes of the brush made her hair shine exactly, as I have said before, like oat-straw. Nothing could have been purer and more shining. It was marvellously burnished, and she laughed at me in the mirror because I stood there so staring and speechless and stunned.

"Well, do I look nice? You think I shall pass in a crowd?"

"Yes."

"That's good. It's nice to have a man's opinion."

She laughed again, and put on her dress. It was pure white, long, and flouncy. I remember distinctly the square, low collar. Then she put on her necklace. It was a single row of pearls and she couldn't fasten it.

"Here, you can do this," she said.

She sat on the bed and I fastened the necklace. The young hair at the nape of her neck was like yellow chicken-down. I was too confused to notice whether she had washed her neck or not; and then she said, "That's it. Now just a little of this and I'm ready."

She sprayed her hair, her arms, and the central shadow of her bosom with scent from a spray.

"How about a little for you?"

She sprayed my hair, and in a final moment of insupportable intoxication I was lost in a wave of wallflowers.

"That's the most expensive scent there is," she said. "The most difficult to make. Wallflowers."

Perhaps it was only natural, next day, as I came to be married to Stella at the altar of the wych-elms, that I found myself oppressed by a sensation of anticlimax. Something about Stella, I felt, had not quite ripened. I had not the remotest idea as to what it could be, except that she seemed, in some unelevating and puzzling way, awkward and flat.

"What do you keep staring at me for?"

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" I'm just going to spray you with scent," I said. " There—piff! pish! pfiff—"

" Whatever made you think of that? "

I was afraid to speak of Hilda and I said, " All girls have to have scent on when they're married."

" Do I look nice? "

She didn't really look nice. The lace curtain was mouldy in one corner and had holes down one side. I didn't like the odour of cow-parsley. But the soft, golden, oat-straw hair was as remarkable as ever and I said, " You look all right."

Then we were married. After we were married she said, " Now you have to make love to me."

" Why? "

" Everybody has to make love when they're married."

I looked at her in utter mystification.

Then suddenly she dropped the cow-parsley and pushed back her veil and kissed me. She held me in an obliterating and momentary bondage by the trunk of the wych-elm, kissing me with such blistering force that I lost my cap.

I was rather upset about my cap as it fell in the nettles below, but she said, " Sit down. We're in bed now. We have to be in bed now we're married. It's the first thing people do."

" Why? "

" Don't you know? "

I did not know; nor, as it happens, did she. But one of the advantages of being born one of a family of seven sisters is that you arrive much earlier at the approximation of the more delicate truths than you do if you are a boy.

Perhaps in this respect I was a backward boy, but I could only think it was rather comfortless trying to make love in a wych-elm, and after a time I said, " Let's go and play in the loft now."

" What with? "

" I don't know," I said. " Let's have a change. We've been married an awful lot of times—"

" I know," she said. " We'll play with the chest-developers."

While we played in the loft with the chest-developers she had an original thought. " I think if I practise a lot with these I shall get fat up top more quickly."

" You will? "

" I think I shall soon, anyway."

Like Hilda, I thought. A renewed sensation of agreeable and stupefying delight, together with a scent of wallflowers, shot deliciously through me; and I was halfway to the realisation of the truth that girls are pleasant things when she said, " One day, when we're big, let's be really married, shall us? "

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"All right."

"Promise?"

"Yes," I said.

"You know what you'll be when you're married to me, don't you?" she said.

I couldn't think.

"You'll be a viscount," she said.

"What's a viscount?"

"It's the husband of a viscountess."

"How shall I come to be that?"

"Because a viscountess is the daughter of a lord."

"But," I said, "your father isn't a lord."

"No," she said, "but his brother is. He lives in a castle in Bedfordshire. It has a hundred-and-forty rooms in it. We go there every summer. And when he dies my father will be a lord."

"Is he going to die?"

"Soon."

"Supposing your father dies before he does?"

"Oh, he won't," she said. "He's the youngest son. The oldest always dies first."

She went on to tell me many other interesting things about our life together. Everything in that life would be of silk, she said, like her father's shirts. Silk sheets on the bed, silk pillows, silk tablecloths, silk cushions. "And I shall always wear silk drawers," she said. "Even on weekdays." Altogether, it seemed, we should have a marvellous life together.

"And we shall drink port wine for supper," she said. "Like my father does. He always drinks port wine for supper."

"Is it nice?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm allowed to have it sometimes. You'll like it. You can get drunk as often as you like then. Like my father does."

"Does he get drunk?"

"Not as often as my mother does," she said, "but quite a lot."

I suppose I was shocked.

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "Lords always get drunk. That's why people always say 'drunk as a lord.' That's the proper thing to do."

Armed with the chest-developers, we spent an ecstatic afternoon. I was so filled with the golden snobbery of being a viscount that it was a cold and dusty sort of shock when she told me that anyway we couldn't be married for years and years, not until she was fatter, like Hilda was.

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The recollection of Hilda, all burnished and magnificent and intoxicating and perfumed, inflamed and inspired me to greater efforts with the chest-developers.

"We must work harder," I said.

I wanted so much to be a lord, to live in a castle, to drink port wine, and to be married to someone with silk drawers that I was totally unprepared for the shock my mother gave me. "The little fibber, the little story-teller, the little liar," she said.

"But she said so," I said. "She told me."

"I went to board school with Reggie Candleton," she said. "He was in my class. They came from Gas Street."

Nothing in the world was worse than coming from Gas Street. You could not go lower than Gas Street. The end of the respectable world was Gas Street.

"It's she who had the money," my mother said. "Mrs. Candleton. Her father was a brewer and Reggie Candleton worked there. He was always such a little dandy. Such a little masher. Always the one for cutting such a dash."

I decided it was wiser to say nothing about the prospect of marrying, or about Stella's urgent efforts with the chest-developers, or the silk drawers.

"All top show," my mother said. "That's what it is. All fancy fol-di-dols on top, and everything dropping into rags underneath. Every one of them with hair like a ten-guinea doll and a neck you could sow carrots in."

I don't suppose for a moment that Stella remembers me; or that, on an uncomfortable, intimate occasion, we were married in a wych-elm. It is equally unlikely that Hilda remembers me; or that, with her incomparable yellow hair, her white dance dress, her soft, blonde flesh, and her rare scent of wallflowers, she once asked me to give her my opinion as a man. I believe Stella is married to a bus-conductor.

The rest of the Candletons have faded from my life. With the summer frocks, the summer straw-hats and the summer flannels, the cummerbunds, the silk shirts, the elegant brogues, the chest-developers, and the incomparable yellow hair they have joined Mr. Candleton in misty, muted, permanent bankruptcy.

Love in a wych-elm is not an easy thing; but like the Candletons it is unforgettable.

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It is not true that the English do not appreciate music. They may not understand it, but they absolutely love the noise it makes.

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

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The ability to make love frivolously is the chief characteristic which distinguishes human beings from the beasts.

HEYWOOD BROUN

Miss J. Hunter Dunn, Miss J. Hunter Dunn,
Furnish'd and burnish'd by Aldershot sun,
What strenuous singles we played after tea,
We in the tournament—you against me!

Love-thirty, love-forty, oh! weakness of joy,
The speed of a swallow, the grace of a boy,
With carefullest carelessness, gaily you won;
I am weak from your loveliness, Joan Hunter Dunn.

JOHN BETJEMAN, *A Subaltern's Love-Song*

Hard Court

Then Blanche came along for tennis, and when Mr. Loftus said it was too hot, that he had no things, that the court was not fit, she said: "Nonsense." So she made him roll the court himself and tie up the net with string, and she borrowed the agent's trousers for him and lent him her second-best racket; and she showed him new strokes all the afternoon and fairly abused him when he could not do them. I heard her myself call him an ass, the very first day.

So she bullied him and made him run about, and the next day it was riding in the field, because she wanted to practise her riding. Mr. Loftus had despised riding about on a cob, but he did not mind when Miss Blanche made him take her out. Then it was picnics to Longwater, and sailing, and the end of it was, after only a week, that they were engaged, and she had on her finger the ring that poor Mr. Loftus had bought for her sister.

JOYCE CARY, *Herself Surprised*

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Learning by Experience

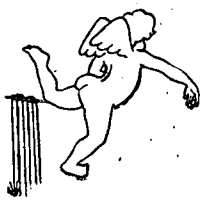
She plays the game with a ready hand,
A steady hand and true;
She marked her man when the game began
And she knows him through and through.
Nothing to win and nothing to lose,
And nothing to choose or care—
A kiss for the stakes, and, if his heart breaks,
She is only playing fair.
A smile, a rose and a maddened fool,
A saddened fool and wise—
The game is done, the woman won—
Dear God! the look in her eyes!
But, ah, time was e'er the woman would,
E'er the woman could, and now
She owes her skill to the careless will
Of the man who taught her how!

ANON

Undistracted by Sex

Meanwhile the husbands of these various ladies, frankly relieved, as Englishmen always are, by a respite from feminine company, were gambling at the other end of the long room, playing, no doubt, for much higher stakes than they would have been allowed to by their wives and with a solid, heavy masculine concentration on the game itself, undisturbed by any of the distractions of sex . . . Boy Dougdale came and sat with Polly and me and showed us how to play backgammon, holding our hands as we shook the dice, rubbing our knees with his, generally behaving, I thought, in a stchoopid and lecherous way.

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*



Business babies,
svelte and glossy,

Are your dream-men
boys or bossy?
Do you scorn the
youthful clique?
Love your lovers
chic to chic?

D. A. NICHOLAS JONES.

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The Pro

To-day Teddy Wise was officiating in person.

"Hallo, here's Sally," he said as she approached. "And all glorious without."

"All glorious without what?" Sally gave the regular response . . .

She took her place in the front rank of the little platoon, whose uniform was shorts, brassière, and sandals; followed the exercises Teddy sketched out in easy, perfunctory movements; vaguely heard the grunts and protests of the older women at the back, whose elasticity was not a match for their earnestness. Doing a trunk-roll, her eyes on Teddy to keep the rhythm, she thought, he's got a marvellous chest, just like Johnny Weissmüller: and his arms—wish I could tan like that—of course he's doing it all the summer: must be funny, just playing games all the time, queer sort of life—and women yearning at you from every angle . . .

NICHOLAS BLAKE, *Malice in Wonderland*

Beau Strings

Dear Bess with her elegant figure and face,
Looks quite a Diana, the queen of the place;
But as for the shooting—she never takes aim;
She talks so, and laughs so! the beaux are to blame.

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY, *The Archery Meeting*

Animal Grab

She uttered a quivering laugh. "No, you are much more like an eagle, waiting to strike. Why don't you, I wonder and—and take what you want?"

Nick's answering laugh had a mocking note in it. "Oh, I can play Animal Grab as well as anybody—better than most . . ."

"Take me then, Nick," she said.

He took the extended hands with quick decision, first one and then the other, and laid them on his shoulders.

"Now look at me," he said.

She hesitated, though not as one afraid.

"Look at me, Muriel!" he insisted.

Then, as she kept her eyes downcast, he put his hand under her chin and compelled her . . . She was conscious of a sudden, leaping flame behind the pale lashes, felt his hold tighten while the wrinkled face drew near,—and with a sob she clasped her arms about his neck and turned her lips to his.

ETHEL M. DELL, *The Way of an Eagle*

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RAPID ORBIT

The planet turned and spun—
it was a splendid sight

BY AVRAM DAVIDSON

JIM BAKER stayed dumb, though puzzled, to the last—which was when Randal Wilcox put the last tin of microfilm in the suitcase. Randal had to lift up the sheaf of papers to fit it in, and Baker recognised the one on top and he gave a startled squeak. He put out one hand. " The Project Director—"

He said that much before Randal Wilcox shot him.

It was only in fiction, Wilcox thought, as he finished packing, that the man-about-to-kill gave a full resumé of his reasons to the victim-elect. But there really wasn't enough time, so poor Jim Baker had to die only partly informed. The glimpse of the top paper, the one on the liquid oxygen gauge, had told him a lot. And he wouldn't have come all the way up here after his lab partner in the Project if he hadn't suspected—well, something.

" Randy," he'd said, " this is no time for you to go off like this—*fishing?* You heard the news: the Russians . . ."

Wilcox at first thought to bluff him, tell him he needed at least a short holiday before the satellite programme—Project Moonbeam—went into accelerated activity, as it was bound to do with the Sputnik beeping away like an alarm bell in the night. Let Jim think that the suitcase open on the bed meant he was still *un*packing. But then he realised with one of the intuitive flashes which so often came to help him in tight places, that there was a better way. He continued to pack.

" You haven't even asked the Project Director for a leave of absence," Jim stumbled on. A good scientist, Jim, but awfully slow about everything else. " Or he'd have asked *me.*"

So Randal said nothing further to his lab partner. He just shot him.

Wilcox got across the border with no difficulty, of course. The Embassy hadn't expected him, but they at once provided a car which took him directly to the coast, where there was a Russian ship. No tiresome business about passports or anything of that sort. A week later he was in Moscow.

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Grisha Ivanov said to him, " Of course, you are very welcome, Mr. Baker. But would you mind telling us where your partner, Mr. Wilcox, is? The disappearance of both of you has been noted but it would seem that only you have left the United States."

" That is true—but I am Wilcox. I thought that if we both vanished and I posed as Baker it would confuse things at that end, which would help things at this end," Wilcox said. And he told the science chief that Jim Baker was in his, Wilcox' car under the waters of Lake Tippset.

Ivanov didn't even blink. " It is too bad," he said, " that you weren't able to persuade Mr. Baker to accompany you. However—"

" There was no time." Wilcox was somewhat nettled. " And Baker isn't—wasn't—an easy man to persuade."

The Russian nodded. " And what has, ah, convinced *you*, Mr. Wilcox? You are known to us only as a scientist—not as a Leninist scientist."

Wilcox smiled on one side of his face. It was a young face—young and smooth—but hard. " My politics are those of any sensible man, of *every* sensible man. For most of my life the democracies—pardon me, the capitalist nations—were in the lead. So I was with them. Now the lead has passed to you, so I am with you." He smiled again the same way. " If you'll have me . . ."

The Russian smiled, too, this time. A fleeting, swift smile. His face was neither as young nor as smooth as the American's, but it was just as hard. " We are very glad to have you . . . I have been able to give the information you brought with you only the most hasty examination, but tell me: can you build a satellite to hold a man, keep him alive while he circles between Earth and Moon and observes both, and then return him safely? "

" No," said Wilcox.

" Neither can we. . . that is, not until now. Your information, it would seem, supplies the elements missing in mine. Together—but now let us get to work . . ."

Wilcox had nothing to complain of in his new life. If he asked for personnel, he got personnel. If he requested materials, he received materials. At no time was there any talk of economy or budget or making do. As for his private comforts, they were so amply provided that he never had to ask for anything.

It was only a few months after his arrival in his new homeland—the homeland of every sensible man—that the Wilcox-Ivanov artificial satellite was ready. He wondered, briefly, how far Project Moonbeam had progressed, with two of its best team mates no longer with it. Still not off the drawing-board, probably.

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He said as much to Grisha Ivanov as they approached the take-off area. The Soviet scientist only grunted.

"Our man will be rather cramped in his moon," Wilcox observed, looking inside. "How long will he stay up, do you suppose?"

Ivanov shrugged. "Who knows? Two weeks? Six weeks? We shall see."

Wilcox nodded. Cramped, more cramped than Jim Baker, in that car under Lake Tippset. Poor old foolish Jim. Had they found him yet? Nothing had been said about it here.

Suddenly Wilcox' eyes fell upon a space in the maze of dials and devices. He frowned. "Where is the control to start him back to Earth?" he asked.

"Removed," said Grisha crisply. "Decided against."

"Who decided?" Wilcox demanded angrily. "I—"

"*You?* You have nothing to say." Grisha's voice was cold. Wilcox looked at him, astonished. "You joined us from opportunism only. Yesterday you betrayed your own country. Tomorrow they will very probably catch up with us; if not tomorrow, then the day after—in which case you will betray *us* for the same reason. So you are not trusted. You have no say in the matter. The man stays up."

Wilcox started to speak, thought better of it. The sensible man never argues. "Very well. Who is the man, by the way?"

"You," said Ivanov calmly, as the guards seized Wilcox.

"We are giving you the chance to test your own work—the device you enabled us to build. Much of the information will be sent automatically, but some of it you will send. The human brain is by no means obsolete. As long as you send, you will be fed. How long will the food supply last? Who knows how much a man in cislunar space requires? That is part of the experiment. . . No, I do not think you will court suicide by refusing to report. You are, after all, a sensible man."

Randal Wilcox speeds round the Earth faster than any human has ever sped before. It is very cramped in the satellite he helped build, but it is dangerous for him to try to move, anyhow: he is studded with attachments—needles, tubes, wires, catheters, electrodes, which spring from his flesh.

He travels from the south-east in a rapid orbit and sees the planet which was his former home turn and spin beneath him. It is a splendid sight. Meteors dart past him—none, so far, have hit him—but every so often he sends in reports about them. About them and about gamma rays and light refraction and sundry other matters.

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Whenever his report is transmitted, a light flashes and a fresh supply of liquid food is allowed to drip into his veins.

The stars blaze hugely. Cloud masses drift across the face of Earth.

But very often he can make out clearly the country he betrayed . . . the Gulf, the Rockies, the Great Lakes . . . Whenever he passes over it, he sends out a signal of his own, over and over, until the turning planet tilts and turns its other face to him and shows the ice-capped Poles, the Urals, the Caucasus . . .

Everyone hears it. *Blip blip blip—beep beep beep—blip blip blip.*

Everyone knows it is Randal Wilcox sending out his SOS. But, of course, no one can help him at all.

Even if anyone wanted to.

★ ★ ★

MIND'S EYE

Imagine ghosts, gods, and devils.

Imagine hells and heavens, cities floating in the sky and cities sunken in the sea.

Unicorns and centaurs. Witches, warlocks, djinns, and banshees.

Angels and harpies. Charms and incantations. Elementals, familiars, demons.

Easy to imagine, all of those things: mankind has been imagining them for thousands of years.

Imagine spaceships and the future.

Easy to imagine; the future is really coming and there'll be spaceships in it.

Is there then anything that's *hard* to imagine?

Of course there is.

Imagine a piece of matter and yourself inside it, yourself aware, thinking, and therefore knowing you exist, able to move that piece of matter that you're in, to make it sleep or wake, make love or walk uphill.

Imagine a universe—infinite or not, as you wish to picture it—with a billion, billion, billion suns in it.

Imagine a blob of mud whirling madly round one of those suns.

Imagine yourself standing on that blob of mud, whirling with it, whirling through time and space to an unknown destination.

Imagine!

FREDRIC BROWN

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MOTIVE FOR MURDER

A desperate man is always dangerous

BY HUGH PENTECOST

IT was hot on the terrace of the Pensión México, but not oppressive, because of the dry air.

It was incredibly noisy—the crowds cheering, the roar of racing cars, testing, driving out through the winding streets to a stretch of road on the outskirtsof Tuxtla Gutiérrez where they could really get up speed.

Tomorrow morning at six o'clock, approximately one hundred and fifty of the fastest racing cars in the world would take off from this jungle city in the south of Mexico on a five-day, death-dealing race to Juarez on the American border. For five days Mexico would be thinking of nothing but the race—the Carrera Panamericana. It was a period of national holiday.

Alan Quist was not interested in racing cars or national holidays. He was trying to get Senor Calderone to abandon his holiday mood, and think with the mind of a policeman.

" I saw the girl with my own eyes," Alan said quietly. " I saw her lying on a slab in the morgue with her hair floating round her white face." That was a little over-elaborate, but perhaps a flowery presentation of the facts would stir Senor Calderone's poetic soul.

Calderone made a clucking noise of sympathy.

" It is your job to prevent crime as well as to solve it after it has happened."

" Certainly," Calderone agreed.

Alan reached for a cigarette, and was annoyed to notice that his hand wasn't quite steady.

" Eric Pulver will murder Ramon Ramirez," he said, " unless you do something to prevent it.

" We can't just sit here and wait."

Calderone shrugged his fat shoulders. " No one could kill Ramon Ramirez and leave Mexico alive, senor. Ramirez is a national hero."

" Eric Pulver doesn't care whether or not he leaves Mexico alive, once he has settled with Ramirez," Alan said.

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Calderone waved apologetically at the noisy, screaming street. "How could I find him?" he asked.

"You have men," Alan said. "Pulver is a well-known figure, even in Mexico. Many of his films are shown here. Hundreds of people would recognise him."

"I have men," Calderone said. "But where are they? They patrol one thousand nine hundred and eight miles of road from here to Juarez. The spectators must be protected along the route.

"If I take a man away from a dangerous curve in the mountains and say to him, 'Find for me the handsome young film actor, Senor Pulver,' will he go? He will not. He will grumble his way off for a few hundred feet perhaps, and then there will be an emergency and he will come bounding back, grinning at me. 'I will find Senor Pulver,' he will tell me, '*after* the Carrera.'"

Alan brought his fist down on the table so hard that plates and glasses jumped. "You are going to let murder be done?"

Calderone gave him a mildly reproving look. "Men who announce loudly that they intend to commit murder or take their own lives never do." He sighed. "That girl was Senor Pulver's sister?"

"She was."

"She swam out into the ocean—"

"Until she drowned."

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Alan's hand tightened on his glass, and suddenly it crumpled. He stared curiously at the blood that trickled from his cut palm.

" You have injured yourself, Senor Quist," Calderone said with real concern. He beckoned to a small, dark waiter. " Here, Fernando, bring a clean napkin."

The waiter was suddenly wrapping a cloth round Alan's hand. " Keep this napkin wrapped round your hand, senor, till I fetch some iodine." He scurried off.

Calderone said, smiling, " Ramirez has been testing his car on the outskirts of town. He has been a simple target all day. Your Senor Pulver could have assassinated him a dozen times."

Alan felt exhausted from trying to stir this man. " Pulver will assassinate Ramirez from a distance only if everything else fails. He will try to get to him alone, face to face, so that Ramirez will know *why* before he dies."

Calderone took a sip of his drink. " I listen to you with sympathy, Senor Quist. But Senor Pulver is not in Tuxtla Gutiérrez."

" He left Hollywood a couple of hours before me in a chartered plane," Alan said.

" Your friend Inspector Martin telephoned me," Calderone said, " so I sent word to our airport: ' When the famous film actor, Senor Pulver, steps out of his chartered plane, place him under arrest.' " Calderone shrugged. " Senor Pulver never came, senor. I suggest to you he has thought better of his madness and returned to Hollywood."

Alan Quist had not become one of the most popular journalists in America without being sensitive to human emotions, griefs, joys, tragedies. He knew Eric Pulver; had known him long before Eric's Hollywood success. When Alan had come to the coast a few days before, he had looked up Eric, and they had dined together at a quiet restaurant. It had been a pleasant reunion until Alan had asked after Katharine, Eric's sister. Eric was concerned about her because she seemed to have been swept off her feet by Ramon Ramirez, internationally-known playboy, polo player, racing driver and, as Eric put it, prize cad.

" We all have to have our fling sometime in life," Alan had said fatuously, not thinking.

Eric had invited him home for a nightcap to the bungalow he and Kathy shared, and at home they had run into black tragedy. There was a note.

Eric. Forgive me. You were right about Ramon. He doesn't begin to understand what it means to love—to be faithful. You may hate me for it, but I can't go on without him. Your loving Kathy.

There had been frantic phone calls to the police; and finally the girl had been found dead. Eric, who was devoted to his sister, had been crazy with grief, and had sworn to kill Ramirez.

Eric had started out on a wild search for him, but Ramirez had left for Tuxtla Gutiérrez in Mexico to drive in the Carrera Panamericana. Eventually, Alan left Eric at home, confident that

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hysteria had burnt itself out. But an hour later he was wakened in his hotel room by the bedside telephone. It was Eric.

"I'm at the airport, Alan. I've chartered a plane to take me to Tuxtla. I'm going to kill him. But before he dies *he is going to know why*."

"Eric, listen—"

"I don't expect to get away with it, Alan, but I have to try. Good-bye, Alan." Eric was gone.

Alan had phoned his friend, Inspector Martin of the Hollywood police, but Eric's plane had taken off. Martin had arranged a charter plane for Alan and had promised to get in touch with Calderone, and Alan had flown more than two thousand miles over the jagged mountain spine of Mexico to Tuxtla, praying he would not be too late to save Eric from himself.

There was a buzz of excitement on the terrace. It was Ramirez, wearing a white linen suit, a single rosebud in his buttonhole. The crowd loved him, and he waved to them cheerfully. Ramirez was not alone. With him was a blonde, her skin tanned to the colour of rich honey, her eyes hidden by black glasses, her figure voluptuously outlined by a white sharkskin suit. Alan recognised her as the Swedish star who was creating great excitement in the film capital. Trailing her was a pudgy, dark man whom Alan recognised as her Hollywood agent. Alan became aware of others who were watching the grand entrance. There was a fair-haired man sitting alone in the corner. Calderone had identified him as Pierre Durand, a French racing driver who was a hot favourite.

Seeing Ramirez, he put down his brandy glass with a shaking hand, then rose abruptly, and walked into the bar.

Ramirez was smiling and bowing to someone else. Alan turned to see who it might be. This was the first time he'd noticed the young couple. They were clearly American. The girl had chestnut hair, cut short and brushed simply. Her eyes were blue, wide-set, and extraordinarily candid. Alan noticed the wedding ring on her left hand. The young man was obviously annoyed, for it was at his wife that Ramirez had smiled and waved. She had looked pleased, then suddenly became aware of her husband's anger. Both her hands closed over his wrist as he started to rise, and Alan could see she was pleading with him earnestly.

Ramirez, the Swedish star, and her agent sat at a table. Her red-lacquered fingertips wriggled across the table as if she couldn't wait to feel Ramirez' touch. He smiled at her, and his hand went to her bare arm and slid down it, sensuously, until it closed over her hand. Alan felt slightly ill.

"The least you can do, Senor Calderone," he said, "is to warn Ramirez about Eric Pulver."

The idea seemed to please Calderone, who smiled and nodded. "If it will make you feel easier, senor." He rose, bowed, and crossed the terrace to where the Ramirez trio sat.

Ramirez laughed, waved at Alan as if to thank him for the

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warning, patted Calderone's fat shoulder. Ramirez seemed to take the threat as a joke.

" Iodine, senor," Fernando's voice said at Alan's elbow.

The iodine stung sharply, but the pain was almost pleasant.

" Senor Calderone talks with the famous," Fernando said. He smiled, but his dark eyes seemed to be amusedly calculating some advantage for himself.

" Ramirez is a great hero to your people," Alan said.

" He is a hero," Fernando said, with a faint smile. " He came, they say, from a family of great aristocracy. He has been, the ignorant believe, a goodwill ambassador for Mexico all over the world. The people love him."

" He has a chance to win tomorrow? "

" He has the car, senor," Fernando said. " And everyone says he is a lion for courage. But he takes no chances—and in the mountains, where there are few spectators, the chance must be taken. The people always think he will win—but he never does."

Calderone came back to the table and went into a flowery speech of thanks. " I am not alone in my gratitude to you, Senor Quist. Ramirez is also much in your debt. He has, however, no fear of Senor Pulver, and if Senor Pulver should be dangerous, Senor Ramirez is quite able to take care of himself."

" Pulver doesn't care whether he, himself, lives or dies. Such a man is always dangerous," Alan said.

" Forgive me, senor," Calderone said, smiling almost affectionately, " you are infected with the melodrama of the films." Calderone lifted his battered Panama courteously. " Good night, senor. I must supervise the police arrangement for the Carrera."

So he was gone, and Alan sat alone on the terrace, with Fernando hovering in the background, and across the way Ramirez held court at his table . . .

" You have neither had to eat or to drink, senor." It was Fernando at Alan's elbow.

" Thanks, I'm not hungry."

" I have brought you a pot of American coffee. You should have something, senor."

Alan looked up at the brown, smiling face of the little waiter. " Thank you, Fernando."

Fernando stood beside the table, turning his silver tray round and round in his quick hands. " You search for the film actor? "

Alan looked up at him sharply. " You know where he is? "

" No, senor; but, like you, I watch for him."

" Why? "

Fernando smiled blandly. " The great Ramirez would pay well for the information, senor. He is a man who is always in the market for information."

Alan lit a cigarette. " What about the Frenchman? "

" Pierre Durand—you have never heard of him, senor? "

" Only that Calderone told me he was a racing driver."

Fernando twirled his tray. " A great designer of the automobile

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engine," he said, "and a great racing driver. He has built his own special car for the Carrera. He has fine mechanics who love him like a brother. He is very popular, though this is the first time he has driven here in three years."

"I thought the great ones always drove in the Carrera."

"You cannot drive in the Carrera, senor, when you are in gaol."

"Why was he in gaol?"

"A partnership with the great Ramirez," Fernando said, and there was irony in his tone. "As I said, Senor Durand is a great designer of engines. Ramirez had money, or ways of getting money—or perhaps he had only credit. But they formed a company after the war to make vehicles for the French army. A delivery of these vehicles was put into action in Morocco in a border skirmish. They were all proved to be faulty in manufacture."

"An accident," Alan said.

"The French did not think so. There was talk of a bribe from the enemy to deliver faulty vehicles."

"And Durand was responsible?"

Fernando's eyes narrowed. "Durand's signature was on the papers which said he had inspected the engines and found them perfect. At the trial Durand claimed that Ramirez had inspected the engines and reported on them. Ramirez had been detained in Madrid on business, so Durand, according to his testimony, signed the inspection papers, taking Ramirez' word.

"The court believed Ramirez when he said he had never inspected the engines and that Durand was trying to throw the blame on him. So Durand went to prison for three years—they could find no proof he had taken money."

"But you believe Durand's story?"

"What does it matter what I believe, senor? I am only a waiter. The people of Mexico do not believe Durand. Ramirez is their hero."

Alan raised his eyes to look out across the darkened city of Tuxtla. Lights burnt in the buildings and on the streets, but to the north there was still twilight. Alan saw a dozen or more great, black birds floating lazily up there against the brick-red horizon.

He gestured towards them. "Those birds, Fernando?"

"Vultures, senor. They hover over the course of the Carrera, waiting."

"For someone to be killed?" Alan asked, his stomach tightening.

"Not people, senor," Fernando said, laughing. "The injured or dead people are quickly removed. But it is the law that all stray animals on the road be shot and killed by the soldiers or the police. They would endanger the drivers. They toss the bodies to the side of the road, and the vultures feed on them. They always seem to know, and they are waiting." Alan sat and watched the birds, circling like grotesque, mechanical toys against the sky.

Alan's room was at the far end of the same corridor where the great Ramirez had his suite. As he walked along the narrow

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corridor, he saw that the door to the Ramirez suite was open. As he passed, Alan heard Ramirez talking in fluent, languid Spanish. He couldn't hear the other person, but whatever was said seemed to amuse Ramirez.

He went on to his own room. He was suddenly very tired. He dropped down on his bed without taking off his clothes and was asleep almost immediately.

He woke with a start, and realised that he had slept deeply. In the distance he could hear the snarl and roar of engines being tested, but the Pensión México itself seemed deathly still. Alan turned on the bedside lamp and looked at his watch. It was five minutes to four. Ramirez should have started out for the car compound by now—and there would be no one watching for Pulver in the huge crowd of people.

Alan got up quickly and hurried along the hall. As he approached the Ramirez suite he saw that the door was still open, almost as he had seen it over six hours ago. He hesitated, listening. There was no conversation now—only the pungent smell of an Egyptian cigarette. Alan remembered noticing that Ramirez smoked an imported brand.

He knocked and called out, " Ramirez! "

There was no answer.

Alan stepped through the doorway into the suite's sitting-room. It was neat, unoccupied. But through the open bedroom door drifted a pale blue haze of cigarette smoke. " Ramirez! "

Still no answer. The muscles in Alan's throat tightened as he walked across to the bedroom door.

Ramon Ramirez sat propped up against the pillows on his bed, the bright smile shining. It was a horribly grotesque smile—because Ramirez' head had been beaten in.

There were things Alan noticed before he started for help. A flat, Egyptian cigarette had burnt out on the edge of the bedside table. There was no sign of the weapon that had been used to club Ramirez to death. His whipcord overalls hung in the wardrobe, and his driving helmet and yellow chamois gloves were on the table by the window.

Alan turned and ran out through the sitting-room, and down the corridor towards the stairway.

Then something exploded inside his head. There was a sharp pain and a pyrotechnic display of lights . . .

Alan recovered consciousness in what seemed to be a small linen-room of the hotel. Twenty minutes to six, his watch told him in the flame from his lighter. He must have been here, unconscious, for almost two hours.

He jammed his shoulder against the door. It was not too firm, but the pain in his head made the jarring almost unbearable. He braced his arms against the shelves and kicked out with his feet at the lock—twice, three times. There was a splintering sound. A final shove with his shoulder, and he staggered out into the hall. It was light now with the early-morning sun.

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He hurried down the stairs, still a little dizzy. There was no one at the desk, no one in the lobby.

In no less than twenty minutes the first car would take off in the Carrera. Everyone in Tuxtla Gutiérrez would be out at the starting point.

He had to find the police, preferably Senor Calderone.

Alan Quist slowed to a walk, forced to elbow his way through the growing crowd. There were vendors selling food from huge baskets, good-luck charms, flags, balloons. There were no policemen. The sound of engines was deafening. The crowd grew denser, and Alan realised they were being held back by some sort of barrier ahead. The start of the race—a long, straight stretch—was roped off and guarded by soldiers. In the centre of the wide roadway he saw a cluster of officials, one of them with a flag tucked under his arm. The time for the start was growing close.

Alan forged ahead through the reluctant, unyielding mass of people. He could see the cars now, including Ramirez' big white one with its decoration of red roses. A mechanic was giving the engine a last check.

Some of the cars would be driven solo, some by a team of two, driver and co-driver. They would start the long grind, known as the bloody gauntlet, in a very few moments. One hundred and fifty cars, starting by classes, one minute apart with five minutes between classes, with methodical regularity, until they were all off into the mountains where there are more than three thousand curves that a driver can miscalculate and go to his death down the mountainside.

Suddenly, directly across from where Alan was pushing his way through the crowd, he saw Calderone. The police officer still wore his stained, white suit and the battered Panama hat.

Alan ducked under the rope and ran across the course. "Senor Calderone!"

"You are just in time for the start, senor," Calderone said equably, without turning his attention from the track.

"I'm afraid you'll have to miss it," Alan said.

"What has happened, senor?"

Alan started to answer, but a great roar from the crowd drowned his voice. Up the road the first car had come out into the centre and was moving slowly towards the starting official. The flag was raised. The driver gunned his engine into a roar of power, as the flag dipped he raced past, and the first car was off in the Carrera Panamericana.

"What has happened, senor?" Calderone asked gently.

"Ramirez," Alan said, choking a little on the pungent oil fumes. "He is in his room at the hotel, his head battered in. He's dead."

"You are joking, senor."

"I'm not joking," Alan said.

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The crowd roared again and Alan missed Calderone's reply. Calderone's smile broadened. "Look, senor."

Alan turned. It was no use trying to talk over the shouts of the crowd, which seemed suddenly to be redoubled. The reason was that the big white car with the decoration of roses was out on the track, the mechanic standing beside it. The crowd was cheering the car of their hero, but they were also cheering something else.

The crowd opened up at a point opposite the car and a figure came through—a figure in whipcord overalls with a cluster of red roses pinned to the shoulder. Goggles had been pulled down over his eyes and the crash helmet covered his ears and chin, but the trade-mark white smile was clearly visible. He was bowing and waving to the crowd. Then he walked on to the track and slid behind the wheel of his car.

"Bill Vance, the mechanic, will fly in Ramirez' special plane to Oaxaca to be ready to service the car there," Calderone said complacently. "Ramirez drives alone."

Alan stared hard. "That is not Ramirez!" he said. "It can't be Ramirez."

"You have seen with your own eyes, senor," Calderone said impatiently.

Alan shook his head like a punch-drunk fighter. "But—you must believe me—I have just seen him with my own eyes, dead in his bedroom at the Pensión México."

"And yet at this moment he passes under the flag, senor."

The big white car was off to a flying start, its driver waving to the crowd.

"You must come back to the hotel with me. I insist," Alan said to Calderone.

"I find myself becoming less fond of you, senor. On this, of all days— "

"I tell you, senor, Ramirez has been murdered."

Calderone looked at his cigar as if it had suddenly lost its flavour. "I will come, senor. But it had better be as you say."

But it was not as Alan had said; it was crazily, impossibly different.

The hotel was still deserted when they arrived. In the distance the roar of the engines, starting at regular intervals, was like a giant pulse beat.

Alan followed Calderone up the stairs.

The door to Ramirez' suite was closed and locked. Calderone looked his exasperation. "You said, senor, you found the door open and left it that way."

"I did."

"It is now locked," Calderone said, as if he were explaining to a child. He took a ring of keys from his pocket and finally found one that would fit the lock.

He unlocked the door and they went in. The sitting-room of the

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suite was empty. "You say, senor, he is in his bed?" Calderone asked.

Alan nodded, his mouth dry.

Calderone's teeth tightened on his cigar as he walked slowly towards the bedroom door. Alan, watching his back, saw that nothing happened—no tightening of muscles, no shock. Silently the big man in the white suit turned and stood aside for Alan to enter the room. His eyes were angry.

Alan walked to the door and stared into the room. The bed was empty. It looked as if it had been slept in, the covers tossed carelessly back. But there were no stains—not a single bloodstain. Instinctively Alan looked for the little flat cigarette he had left on the edge of the bedside table. Gone. The wardrobe was empty, the whipcord overalls gone. The crash helmet and the monogrammed chamois gloves were gone from the table.

Alan didn't recognise the sound of his own voice. "He sat in the bed, propped up against the pillows," he said. "The pillowcases and the sheets were spattered with blood. The whole top of his head had been battered in, as if he had been struck a great many times. An Egyptian cigarette—the kind that he smoked—had burnt out on the edge of the table. His overalls hung in the wardrobe; his driving helmet and gloves were on that table by the window."

"Perhaps you will tell me we are in the wrong suite," Calderone said.

"No. This is the suite."

"Then explain to me what has happened, senor, so that I shall not continue to suspect you have deliberately hoaxed me."

"I can't explain," Alan said dully. "I can only repeat what I saw."

Calderone looked slowly round the room. "You and I," he said softly, "have together seen Ramirez drive off in his car at the start of the Carrera. For what reason you persist in this delusion that you have seen him dead, I do not know. That bruise on your head—perhaps, senor, you are in need of medical attention." He gave Alan a stiff little bow, turned, and left the suite.

For a long time Alan stood in the middle of the empty bedroom, staring at its neat arrangement. True, he had seen what looked like Ramirez, bowing and smiling, wearing Ramirez' clothes, climbing into the white car, and driving off alone.

But what he had seen here was even more real. Calderone might not believe him; no one might be persuaded to believe him now. But when the white car arrived at Oaxaca, the end of the first leg of the race, the man with the red roses pinned to his overalls would *not* be Ramirez. Somehow, Alan knew, he must get there to prove it.

He left the suite and went downstairs to the deserted lobby of the hotel. There, to his angry amazement, he found the reception clerk sound asleep on a kind of sofa. Calderone hadn't bothered to wake him and question him.

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Alan shook the man awake and pulled him up to a sitting position. "How do I get to Oaxaca?"

"You have a car, senor?"

"No."

The man shrugged. "Then I do not know how you get to Oaxaca, senor."

"You know of no one who has a car or a plane for hire?"

"No one, senor."

Alan started to turn helplessly away, but decided to ask another question, "Ramirez—did he sign out of the Pensión?"

"But of course, senor."

"He signed out when he left? You *saw* him?"

"Senor Ramirez is a man of great courtesy, senor," the clerk said pointedly. "He signed out before he went to bed, so that he would not have to disturb anyone in the morning."

A hot sun had risen well up into the sky when Alan walked on to the terrace of the Pensión. In the distance he could still hear the racing cars starting with monotonous regularity. It was seven-thirty. They would be continuing to take off for another hour.

"Oh, I do hope you speak English," a voice said behind him.

Alan turned and found himself face to face with the young girl he had seen on the terrace with her husband the night before. There was a smudge of dirt on one side of her upturned nose. Her dress was a pale blue linen, simple, unadorned. Alan, who had a quick ear for voices, thought there was a faint New England intonation in her speech.

"Yes, I speak English," he said, and found himself smiling.

"Thank goodness." A strand of hair dropped down over her forehead and she blew it out of her eyes. "I'm really in the most awful trouble. I'm Angela Bryon, and Charles found at the last minute he'd brought five thousand feet of indoor film, which is, of course, of no earthly use, and he telegraphed to Mexico City for some outdoor film, but they wouldn't send it down here, so all he could do was to fly up there himself, which means he had to miss the beginning of the Carrera, and he will be flying to Oaxaca, but meanwhile I have no way of getting there, and I have the bed-rolls, and the camera, and if—"

"But," Alan interrupted, "what can I . . ."

She smiled disarmingly. "Charles will tear his hair out if I am not in Oaxaca with this camera, because this is the one he is getting the film for. The whole thing is quite absurd. I have a perfectly good shooting brake, but I can't get anyone to drive it, because I don't speak a word of Spanish or Mexican or whatever they speak here in Tuxtla, and unless I can find someone to—"

"Please," Alan said, "let's get this straight. You have to get to Oaxaca with your husband's camera, and you have a perfectly good shooting brake, and you can't get anyone to drive it. Does that mean you can't drive?"

"It's silly, isn't it?" Angela said. "But I've had a badly-fractured wrist."

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" It's bad luck," Alan said. " But may I introduce myself? My name is Alan Quist. If you'll have me, I'm your chauffeur."

" Oh, bless you! " Angela said.

" Your husband is a film cameraman? "

" Oh, no. Charles is a college lecturer. Photography is his hobby," Angela said, " and he took some pictures of the ski competitions at the University, and Johnny Quincey saw them and said they were some of the best sports films he had ever seen, so he asked Charles to cover the Carrera."

" Suppose we get our things together and find that shooting brake of yours," Alan said. " We should be able to start for Oaxaca in less than an hour."

The brake, parked at the rear of the Pensión México, proved to be new and in excellent condition. There were only the bed-rolls and the camera with its tripod and one suitcase in the rear. Alan had collected his own bag from the hotel. Angela proved invaluable. She knew a short cut to the main highway at the far end of the town. The intersection was blocked by soldiers and dense crowds. The competitors in the Carrera were still passing, streaking for the mountains.

At about a quarter to nine the last of the racing cars passed the intersection and the crowd dissolved. The soldiers waved Alan forward, and they turned on to the main road.

Angela talked almost incessantly as they began the climb high into the mountains. She told about her childhood in Vermont and how she had met Charles at the University. They had married very young, Alan gathered. Her family had tried to break up the engagement and had taken her to Europe for a summer, her one big fling. " But Charles was determined to marry me," Angela said, " and I was determined, and so here I am."

The road, in terms of the race which roared away ahead of them, was incredible. It was made up, but it was rough; a tortuous route of blind curves, S-bends, hairpin bends, and sudden roller-coaster dips, up and down mountains, along straight stretches almost at sea level, and then up again, ten thousand feet into the mountains.

Ahead, rising above the crest of a hill, Alan saw the big, black vultures, circling and diving.

They had gone about thirty miles when they found the road ahead completely blocked by a crowd of people. There seemed to be great excitement, waving of hands and arms. Alan pulled the brake over to the side of the road after much sounding of the horn had moved no one. The men looked grave. He saw several women clinging to each other, weeping. Overhead, a bright red helicopter circled.

" I'll see what it is," Alan said.

He got out of the car and started to edge through the crowd. The first understandable word he heard turned his blood suddenly cold. " Ramirez! " a woman wailed, and buried her face on a friend's shoulder, sobbing.

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Ramirez! Alan surged forward through the crowd to the edge of the road. About a hundred yards down the bank he saw the big white car decorated with red roses lying with its wheels in the air. Not far from the car a body lay on the ground, covered by a brightly-coloured Mexican shawl.

Overhead the helicopter was noisy, its pilot evidently planning to land in a small place not far from the wrecked car. Alan headed straight for the body. He reached it, hesitated a moment, then knelt and pulled back the shawl.

Sweat broke out all over his body. The figure lying under the bright shawl was Ramon Ramirez, his teeth bared in the bright smile of death, the top of his head brutally smashed in.

Someone pushed Alan angrily away and covered Ramirez' face.

The helicopter now landed a few yards away, and a small ladder was dropped to the ground. Out of the helicopter came Senor Calderone, a long, thin cigar between his teeth. Instantly he was surrounded by a dozen jabbering Mexicans, all trying to explain at once. Calderone came slowly over to where Alan stood, dazedly, by the body. He nodded casually to Alan, bent down, and pulled back the shawl. He stared for a long time into the dead man's face, and then he straightened up. " You have seen, senor? "

Alan nodded.

" It then becomes obvious, does it not, that you could not have seen him dead in the hotel? "

" Look at the blood," Alan said, his voice hoarse. " It has been caked dry and hard for a long time."

Calderone shook his head as if he was really grieved. " You are a very stubborn man, senor," he said.

Calderone flicked the ash from his cigar. " I have been watching the race from that machine." He pointed to the helicopter. " I did not see the accident, but I was informed about it by short-wave radio. This, I told myself, will settle everything, both for me and for the poor, confused Senor Quist. How is your head, senor? "

Alan stared gloomily at the body. If Calderone could not see that the blood was dry and caked, surely an autopsy would substantiate the facts. Ramirez' overalls were scratched and torn. The roses were still pinned to the left shoulder. Someone had removed the crash helmet and goggles and placed them neatly beside the body. The hands had been folded across the chest, one of them clenched and bare, the other encased in a fancy chamois glove. Alan looked round. There was no sign of the second glove.

Calderone had turned away and was talking to a couple of men in the crowd. There had been no dangerous curve where the crash occurred. They speculated whether a tyre had burst, or the steering had failed.

" Since he had no co-driver, there is no witness." He turned to Alan. " Well, Senor Quist, how do you explain it? "

" There is only one possible explanation," Alan said. " After

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I had found Ramirez dead in his bed, and was knocked out myself, someone moved the body from the room to this place."

"And cleaned up the room?"

"And cleaned up the room," Alan said doggedly. "Someone doubled for Ramirez at the start of the Carrera, drove the car this far, faked the accident, and left Ramirez' body beside the wrecked car."

"And disappeared into thin air?" Calderone sighed. "You are guessing, senor. And you are trying to complicate a matter of extreme simplicity. Senor Ramirez has unfortunately been killed in an accident. There is no more to it."

"You believe that?" Alan asked.

Calderone shrugged. "I cannot prevent you from exhausting yourself over a dream, senor. Perhaps I shall see you in Oaxaca." He turned away and climbed back into the helicopter.

Alan glanced up the hill. Standing a few feet down the bank from the edge of the road was Angela, clutching her straw handbag. Alan started slowly up the bank towards her.

He had covered only half the distance when someone came up from behind and tugged at his sleeve. For a moment Alan didn't recognise the smiling brown face. It was Fernando, the waiter from the hotel, but now he was dressed in peasant clothes with a white cloth tied round his forehead to keep the sweat out of his eyes.

"It is a sad day for the people of Mexico, senor," Fernando said.

"How did you get here, Fernando?"

"It is my holiday. As soon as the Carrera leaves Tuxtla it is my holiday. There will be no one at the hotel for a week. Everyone follows the race, and so I follow it." He seemed to swell with pride. "I have a motor cycle." And he waved up towards the road. "I shall miss the end of the first lap at Oaxaca," he said, "but I can travel ahead of the race for the other four laps and be at Ciudad Juarez to see the winner cross the line."

"I wish you luck," Alan said, and turned back to his climb.

Fernando still tugged at his sleeve. "I heard you were searching for means to get to Oaxaca. I thought of offering you the pillion seat of my motor cycle, but I knew you would not enjoy it."

"Thanks, anyway," Alan said. "Fortunately, I ran across a lady who has a car but can't drive it."

"The senora in the blue dress?"

"Yes."

"Oh, but surely she is pulling your leg, senor."

"How do you mean, pulling my leg?"

"She is leg-pulling, senor, when she says she cannot drive. I saw her with my own eyes this morning—twice this morning."

"Go on, Fernando."

"It was about four-thirty, senor. Just beginning to be daylight. I was finishing up at the Pensión México, and from the window of my room I saw her drive the shooting brake into the car park behind the hotel."

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"You probably made a mistake," Alan said, fighting the feel of muscles tightening in his throat. "There couldn't have been much light then."

"Perhaps, senor, only I think not. After that I went out to watch the start of the Carrera. It had already begun. I missed seeing Durand, Ramirez, and many others. So finally I came back to the hotel to prepare for my own journey. I had packed the things for my knapsack, and was just starting downstairs again when I saw the lady in the blue dress drive into the car park a second time. She had, it seems, been away and returned."

"You're quite certain?"

Fernando nodded. "It was just before seven-thirty, senor. There could be no mistake. I went downstairs and started out to my motor cycle, and the senora and I collided in the doorway. She dropped the little straw bag and everything rolled all over the place. I helped her to recover her belongings. She was very charming. Since you go to join the lady, senor, perhaps you will return to her something which belongs to her."

"What?"

"Her bag spilt, as I told you, senor. I thought we had picked up everything, but after she had gone I found another object." Fernando fumbled inside the brightly coloured sash he was wearing and held something out to Alan.

Alan stared at it, his mouth dry. It was a yellow chamois glove, with a monogram. Ramirez' missing glove.

"That's Ramirez' glove," Alan said.

"That was as I surmised it, senor."

"What do you mean, Fernando? The lady never had that glove. What are you trying to suggest?"

"Senor, ask the lady. She cannot deny it. Perhaps Ramirez gave it to her as—how do you say—a memento?"

Alan stared for a long moment into Fernando's bland and smiling face, then he looked up towards the top of the hill again. Angela stood there, waiting for him. So she could drive—and Ramirez' glove, which probably would not go on his hand, doubled into a fist in death, had been in the little straw bag she carried over her arm.

The sun seemed to concentrate all its heat on Alan as he climbed slowly up the bank. Sweat ran down inside his clothes—and it was cold. At four o'clock Ramirez had been dead—Alan had seen him. At four-thirty Angela, who couldn't drive, had driven the shooting brake to the rear of the hotel. They would have had to get the body into the brake, she and Charles, and they would have had to drive out here thirty miles to hide it, lest it be found before the faked accident.

They would have had to drive back thirty miles, and Charles would have had to dress in Ramirez' other overalls and get to the starting point. She would have waited to see that everything went well—waited until Charles drove off, pretending to be Ramirez. Then back to the hotel—she who couldn't drive.

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Seven-thirty would be about right. And at seven-thirty this girl had made a fool of Alan Quist.

He had reached her now, and she still stared down at the bright scrape that covered Ramirez. Her face looked pale and a little pinched, he thought.

"It seems such a waste," she said. "To die because of a craze for speed."

Alan's mouth was dry. "You knew him?"

"Oh, I didn't really know him," Angela said. "I met him once at a dance—that summer in Europe. Once he came to the winter carnival at the university and Charles took pictures of him ski-ing. I thought he was very romantic, but I didn't know him."

Alan climbed in the driver's seat. "We'd better get going," he said. "We mustn't keep your husband waiting in Oaxaca, must we?"

"He'll be wild if I'm not there with the camera when he gets there, because that's what he's getting the film for, and if I'm not there—" She stopped abruptly. "Are you angry about something?"

"No. Why?"

"You look sort of—funny."

"Ramirez wasn't a pleasant sight," he said, and looked straight at her.

Her lips trembled slightly. "It—it must have been awful," she said.

He started the car. It would be a good six hours to Oaxaca. Time to think. Time to work things out. They wound down and round, and along a flat stretch, and then up into the mountains again. The crowds had disappeared; the race had gone on. But every few miles they saw evidence of its violence. On a sharp S-bend the curve had been banked with bales of hay. A heavy racing car had struck the bales and scattered them like shredded wheat. It lay, a twisted wreck, two hundred feet into the brush it had cut down like a scythe. A mile farther on, the vultures floated patiently over the carcase of a dead burro, shot by the police for wandering on to the road.

"Your husband was jealous of Ramirez," Alan said, out of a long silence.

"Why—why, he scarcely knew him," Angela said in a small voice.

"I saw him—yesterday afternoon—on the terrace of the Pensión México, when Ramirez was smiling and waving to you."

He suddenly jammed on the brakes and stopped. She looked at him, clearly frightened. He was breathing hard and the sweat ran down his cheeks. He reached in his pocket and took out the chamois glove.

She stared at the glove as he dropped it in her lap, her eyes wide. "What—what is it?"

"It's a glove. It's Ramirez' glove, and you can stop putting on an act, and playing the innocent. *What happened?* Charles

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killed him, and then you both tried to make it look like an accident?"

"I—I d-don't know what you're talking about."

"You spilt the contents of your bag, and the waiter at the Pensión México helped you to pick them up. You overlooked the glove. He found it later. What happened? Did you and Charles plan the killing together—or were you dragged into it afterwards? You had to drive the car, didn't you? You, who can't drive!"

"I can't drive! I swear it. I—"

"You were seen—twice." He started the car again. "We've five hours to go. You've plenty of time to think up a good story." He reached out and took the glove and put it in his pocket.

They were out in open country when Angela began to talk rapidly without once looking at Alan.

"That summer I told you about in Europe I went to a dance at the Casino in Cannes, and someone cut in on me and it was Ramirez, although I didn't know anything about him, except that he seemed handsome and romantic, and he danced me on to the terrace and he kissed me in the moonlight—and that was that."

Alan drove on, the gritty dust of the road in his teeth.

"That was all. And I came home, and Charles wanted to know everything that had happened to me, so I told him about the kiss on the terrace, and he was furious and I was pleased that he was furious. And then we got married, and about a year later Ramirez appeared at the winter carnival, and he smiled and laughed and spoke to me, and I had to tell Charles he was the one on the terrace at Cannes. And then we saw him yesterday afternoon. And Charles was just as furious as he had been a year ago."

"So, because you were kissed on the terrace in the moonlight at Cannes several years ago, Charles killed Ramirez, and you carted him out to the course and faked an accident."

"No," she said sharply. "Not Charles."

"Who, then?"

She didn't answer.

Then, after a long time, she said, "Charles discovered about the film when we were going to bed. He—he tried to find some place in Tuxtla Gutiérrez to buy film, but they hadn't any. He found out there was a plane leaving Tuxtla for Mexico City just after midnight—so he took it."

"Just after midnight?"

"Yes. And if you check, you'll find he took it."

"He could have killed Ramirez. I don't know when he was killed. I just know, as you do, that he was dead in his bed in the hotel at four."

"Please, will you check on Charles? Because—don't you see—he should be in the clear."

"Should be?"

"He is—I know he is! If only I'd stopped to think—"

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"Yes?"

That was all. She sat huddled in the seat, staring straight ahead, and they drove on, hour after hour.

Alan's back and neck muscles ached painfully as they finally drove into Oaxaca.

Alan stopped near the entrance to the town's main hotel. He switched off the ignition and sat there in silence. He had been trying to think for hours just what he was going to do.

He turned to Angela, and for a moment he felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. She had opened the straw handbag and she sat now with a small revolver resting in the palm of her hand. He stared at it, fascinated.

"I—I had it all the time," she said. "If—if you were some sort of desperate criminal I—I could have stopped you out there in some—some deserted spot—and—and—" Her eyes pleaded with him to understand. "Please check on Charles before you go to the police. *Please!*"

Alan took his bag out of the car and went into the crowded lobby of the hotel. He found a telephone where he could call his syndicate office in Mexico City. They agreed to check on Charles Bryon, but it would take time. Shops were closed. It might be morning before they could find out whether Charles had actually been there.

"It's the Carrera," the man said at the other end.

But Alan was not listening. He was staring at the last entry in the register.

"Eric Pulver."

The reception clerk beamed. "The famous actor," he said. "He is, I believe, in the bar, senor."

Eric Pulver, palely handsome, sat at a table near the back of the crowded bar, sipping iced coffee.

He saw Alan, and was on his feet immediately. He came over, and his right hand closed on Alan's wrist. "Let's get out of here," he said.

Alan's enormous fatigue seemed to catch up with him. He was quite willing to let Eric take charge for the moment. They went out through the lobby and up a flight of stairs to Pulver's room.

"You look all in," Eric said, when they were alone.

"Thanks to you," Alan said bitterly.

Eric lit a cigarette and turned towards the window.

"I never got there," he said. "I knew you'd be having the airfield at Tuxtla watched, so I came here, thinking it would be easy to get there by car or some other way. It wasn't. No one in Mexico would travel south, with the Carrera heading north." He turned. "The news seemed clear enough. They said his car smashed up and he was killed."

Alan lit a cigarette slowly and started his story. The young actor listened quietly until he had finished.

"You think this girl and her husband are involved?" Eric asked.

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" I'll know about him when I get my report from Mexico City," Alan said. " While I'm waiting to hear from them, there's other checking to be done. What about Pierre Durand? He had the strongest known motive. One of his mechanics might have doubled for Ramirez."

" You have only my word that I never got any nearer Ramirez than Oaxaca," Eric said dryly.

The desk clerk served his final purpose a few moments later. He would take any message that came for Alan from Mexico City. He could not say where Senor Calderone might be found, since he had no regular headquarters in Oaxaca. And as for Senor Durand, the clerk laughed.

" The American drivers stay with their cars all night. The Europeans and the Mexicans take the time to celebrate. There is music and dancing at a café down the street. You can't miss it."

Oaxaca was a happy, jostling, sweating mass of people who didn't want to be bothered with anything unconnected with the Carrera.

Alan turned south along the main street to find the café the reception clerk had mentioned. It wasn't difficult. The strong beat of lively music led him straight to it. Here people were jammed together, while a group of Mexican musicians beat out the music. Alan edged his way through the crowd until he saw the man he was looking for.

Pierre Durand was seated at a table with a couple of his crew. Someone had put a garland of flowers round his neck. People crowded up to him, slapping him on the back, congratulating him. He was the leader at the end of the first day, and they said that unless something happened to him in the mountains, he had the car and the skill to win. Durand was a different person from the bitter, tight-lipped man Alan had seen at the Pensión México. He laughed and responded to people, and raised an iced drink in salute.

Then the café became suddenly dark, except for revolving coloured crystals over the bandstand. The band seemed to be reaching some sort of hysterical climax. People shouted and stamped in rhythm to the music.

Alan moved tortuously through the crowd towards Durand's table. He was a few yards from it when someone jostled him hard, and he felt a sharp, breath-taking pain in his left shoulder. He must have bumped into something sharp and pointed. Automatically, he lifted his right hand to the pain as he kept on pushing his way towards the table. Astonishingly, his hand came away warm and wet—protruding from the left shoulder of his jacket was the handle of a tiny knife.

He turned back towards the street and a less crowded area. It seemed hard to breathe. He leaned against a carved pillar and looked down at his shoulder.

The world began to swim in front of his eyes, brilliant colours burning and revolving. He reached up, closed his hand over the

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knife handle, and gave it an outward jerk. He nearly fainted, but then the pain lessened. The knife was small, but the blade was thin, pointed, and razor-sharp. He could feel blood running down inside his shirt. He must get help. He tried to speak to someone close to him, and wasn't sure his voice could be heard at all. He got his handkerchief out of his hip pocket and stuffed it inside his shirt against the wound. His left arm felt numb and useless. The hotel—there would probably be a doctor at the hotel.

He started forward, staggering, forcing himself to stay upright. People seemed to be pointing at him and laughing. It dawned on him that they thought he was drunk. He leaned against a post outside a closed shop, clung to it desperately, shaking his head in the hope that his vision would clear. Then, suddenly, someone was supporting him.

"Mr. Quist. Alan!"

It was Angela Bryon, her face white.

He tried to smile. "Fate of—busybody," he said. Thank heaven for her shoulder to lean on.

"You must sit down somewhere, Alan, and then I'll get help."

"It's nothing," he said. "Just shock. I—I feel a little faint."

She seemed to be moving him with some purpose across the street. Behind the snack bar was a building with front doors standing open: a big building—a church maybe, Alan thought. Except that there was a sign across the front of it: *Frankenstein con Boris Karloff.*

"It's a cinema," Angela said. "It's empty. No one goes to films on the night of the Carrera. You can sit there while I get help."

Inside the cinema it was cool, and smelt of dead cigarettes and stale pomade. They went a few rows down a side aisle, and then Angela eased him into a seat.

He leaned his head back. It was cool and relatively quiet. Lights flickered against the big, white screen through the open doors at the rear. She lit a cigarette and placed it between his lips.

"Now I'll find a doctor. I'll—"

"Angela."

"Yes?"

"I don't want you to go without telling me. I think if you'd just tell me the truth—the glove—and your driving—"

"Oh, Alan, you need help. I—"

She was suddenly sitting beside him, her arm locked tightly through his.

To his distress, he realised she was crying.

"Charles was so jealous and so furious because Ramirez kept waving and smiling at me," she began, "that I was afraid he'd make a scene. When he had made arrangements to go to Mexico City and had left for the airport, I was up, of course, and I knew that in a few minutes Ramirez would be going to the starting point of the Carrera, so I decided to see him and ask him not to flirt with me because it made Charles so unhappy. I waited for

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him to come out of the hotel but he didn't. So I went up to his suite a little before four.

"You may think that was crazy, but it was very important to me that Charles shouldn't be made unhappy. When I got to the Ramirez suite, the door was standing open and I called out to him, and when he didn't answer I went in, to see if he'd left and I'd somehow missed him. I—I found him, sitting there in his bed."

"Dead," Alan whispered.

She nodded. "I was sure, of course, that Charles had done it."

"Angela!"

"He said he'd take drastic action, and Charles always does what he says he'll do. He'd done it and gone on to the airfield. And while I was standing there, the other man came in."

"What other man?"

"It—it was your friend," she said, in a very small voice.

"Eric? Eric Pulver?"

"Yes. It was pretty awful. When he found Ramirez dead it was an appalling shock to him, especially since he thought I'd done it. He kept offering to help me, he even confessed to me that he had come there to kill Ramirez, and then he realised it wasn't me because there wasn't any weapon there, and when he found out about Charles—"

"You told him about Charles?"

"He—he dragged it out of me. He was so wonderful about it. He said it was his fault—that if he hadn't turned up so late he would have saved Charles by doing it himself, and that no one ought to pay for killing Ramirez, and he'd help me. And he had a plan, which was to take the b-body out to the track—just the way you worked it out—and he said he could double for Ramirez easily because he was the right build, and with the crash helmet and goggles no one would be able to see his face, and he had a sports car of his own.

"The thing was to get Ramirez out to the course, and I told him about our shooting brake, only I couldn't drive, and it was parked about a mile from the hotel. He said I'd just have to drive—it has an automatic gear change and of course I could move it that short distance—"

She paused for breath. "It was true, Alan—I can't really drive yet, but to help him out I did somehow manage to drive the car to the back of the hotel.

"You see, there was so much Mr. Pulver had to do. He had to get Ramirez' body dressed and the room rearranged. The first thing he did was look for a linen cupboard of some sort. He had just found it and was starting out with an armful of clean sheets and pillowcases when you came along and went into Ramirez' room. He hid in the linen-room until you came out again, and then, as you went past, he slugged you. He was very unhappy about it, but we couldn't have the police, could we?" She sighed.

"When I had brought the car I went upstairs again. Mr. Pulver told me about you. He was really upset, because he's very fond

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of you. He had dressed the body in driving clothes, but he couldn't get one glove on because Ramirez' fist was clenched and he couldn't prise it open. So he told me to take the glove and he'd put it by the body later.

"We got the room straightened out, and Mr. Pulver carried Ramirez down to the shooting brake and I carried the stained sheets, and it was awful, because any minute I was sure we would run into someone. But everyone was at the Carrera, so we got Ramirez into the brake and Mr. Pulver drove to the main highway, and he told me to get out and wait there, because if anything went wrong he didn't want me involved.

"So I waited and waited, and finally, after about two hours, he got back, and he said he'd planted the body at a place where he thought he could fake the accident. He'd destroyed the sheets and changed into an overall of Ramirez'. With the helmet and goggles on you couldn't tell who he was. He left me to go to the starting point, and we both forgot about the glove and I had to drive back to the hotel, but really I can't drive, Alan. That was the truth.

"Alan, I'd give my life for Charles, and I thought he must have done it . . . "

Alan was suddenly made aware that the flickering lights were disappearing from the screen, as though someone was pulling a shade across it from right to left. He turned his head, and in the one moment he had any clear vision he saw the outline of a figure closing the outside door—a man's figure with a gun in his hand.

From somewhere Alan recovered strength, and his action was instinctive. He put his right hand on the back of Angela's neck and dragged her with him on to the floor between the seats. In the same instant there was the sharp, double crack of a gun.

There was no sound at all for a moment, and then Alan, straining to hear, caught the very faint noise of someone moving tentatively down the centre aisle. Alan tried to gauge his own strength. In the darkness he might have a chance—and just enough stamina left. He put his lips to Angela's ear.

"He's coming down the centre aisle. I'm going to crawl along on the floor to the aisle. When he gets to me I'm going to jump him."

"Alan, you can't— "

The minute you hear us come together you scram out and get help."

"But, Alan— "

"Do what I tell you! "

"Yes, Alan."

He began to move, painfully, on hands and knees, along the floor towards the centre aisle. At last he felt empty space in front of him. The aisle. He listened. The man with the gun was a few yards away. Agonisingly, Alan raised himself to his feet. His eyes were as used to the darkness as the killer's—and he couldn't see anything. But the man was close. He could sense it.

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Then suddenly, and without warning, the entire building was flooded with light and there was a wild banging and shouting at the doors at the rear. Angela must have made it a moment too soon. Not three feet away, smiling a white, flat smile, was the man with the gun. *Fernando.*

"I am so sorry about this, Senor Quist, but it has to be."

He was too far away for Alan to lunge at him, even if he had had his full strength. He saw Fernando's brown finger tightening on the trigger. Then two things happened at once: an explosion went off in Alan's ear, and the rear doors of the cinema burst open.

Fernando, astonishment on his face, dropped his gun, and sank slowly to the floor. Alan turned and found himself facing Angela. She had the small revolver in her hand.

"I have an awful feeling I've killed him, Alan." Then very slowly, she disappeared down between the seats in a dead faint.

Alan looked towards the back of the cinema again. Charging down the aisle towards him, like a mad rhinoceros, was Charles Bryon.

"There he is, officer," Charles shouted. "I saw him bring my wife in here. I saw him!"

Before Alan could protest, Charles Bryon was on him, his fists flailing. It was clumsy but incredibly violent. A clenched fist jammed into Alan's wounded shoulder, and the pain was excruciating.

Alan passed out cold.

"He will live to hang for the murder of Ramirez," Senor Calderone said placidly. "The senora's bullet merely grazed his temple." He held his lighter to a fresh cigar. He was enjoying himself. He sat behind a desk in the little whitewashed room that was Oaxaca's police station.

Alan, his shoulder bandaged by a local doctor, his arm in a sling, sat in the middle of a row of chairs occupied by himself, Angela and Charles Bryon, and Eric Pulver.

"Fernando was the murderer, and his capture might have been quite simple if it had not been for the romantics," Calderone said, and wagged his finger reprovingly at Angela and Eric. "The motive was not elaborate. Fernando, it seems, has for a long time been doing quite well by blackmailing important personages who crossed his path. Among them was Ramirez. Fernando had made a profitable study of Ramirez. He had bits and pieces of evidence against him.

"The great Ramirez was, it seems, also a great scoundrel. There was, for example, a certain film star who had been bled of her fortune. Ramirez submitted to this blackmail, but he was not a man who would submit for ever to being milked by a third-rate amateur.

"Ramirez paid others to check on Fernando, and at last he came up with proof that Fernando had once been involved in the

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kidnapping of the child of a government official. He had sworn affidavits from two men in prison who hoped for reduced sentences if they bore witness against Fernando. So when Fernando went to Ramirez' room at the Pensión México last night to ask for more money, Ramirez laughed at him. He was, however, not satisfied with having ended the blackmail. He was determined to have his revenge on Fernando. In the morning, he threatened, he would turn Fernando over to the police."

Calderone shrugged. "Fernando did not want to go to prison. So, with the iron door-stop, he battered Ramirez to death. He took the weapon away, cleaned it, and replaced it. He did not worry too much. He thought there was no evidence to tie him to the crime." Calderone shook his head. "And then our romantics got into the picture." He looked at Charles. "Your wife considered you a dangerous killer, Senor Bryon."

"I simply don't understand—" Charles began.

"A woman in love is often a fool, senor. And Senor Pulver lives in a world of melodramatic fancy. Between them they made things very complex for Fernando. Imagine his surprise when, waiting for Ramirez to be discovered, he sees the lady and Senor Pulver remove the body from the hotel and take it away. He cannot understand it, but it can mean only good for him if someone else becomes involved.

"He goes to the start of the Carrera and, more and more amazing, Ramirez seems to arrive and drive off in his car. Fernando has a quick mind. There is only one trouble. He was near us in the crowd, Senor Quist, when you came shouting to me about the murder. He heard you insisting that Ramirez had been murdered. He must watch out for you, he tells himself.

"Well, he follows the race on his motor cycle. Sure enough, the accident. Everything is perfect—except, once more, there is Senor Quist still persisting that it is murder. Senor Quist will not let the sleeping dog lie. I, he thinks, am convinced of the accident."

"You wouldn't listen," Alan burst out. "You wouldn't even admit the blood was dried!"

Calderone smiled indulgently. "Of course I did not admit it, Senor Quist. There was a crowd there. How did I know the murderer was not standing at my elbow? As, in fact, he was. If I agreed with you then and there, the murderer would take to his heels before I had any evidence at all. The moment I was back in the helicopter I radioed the order for an autopsy."

Calderone sighed. "Fernando did not know this, but he does know I am not a fool. It was possible that, sooner or later, you would convince me. So our Fernando thought he would help to point the finger away from himself. Why not at Senor Bryon and the senora? He had the glove she had dropped."

"Why didn't he give it to you instead of to me?" Alan asked.

"Because, Senor Quist, if he gave it to me it would show he doubted the accident. He gave it to you, pretending he thought

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it had some romantic significance. Instead of coming to me, you tried to solve things yourself. To him that meant that the senora had told you her story and that you believed it. So, if the murderer had not been involved in the making of the fake accident, you would investigate—you would check Pierre Durand, and you would eventually clear him. You would discover that he slept with his crew at the starting compound that night and had ten witnesses to his innocence. As I did when I checked.

"In the end you might even check your friend, Senor Pulver. You would find he had been driven to Tuxtla from Oaxaca on a petrol lorry, had arrived only shortly before the senora found the body, and could not have got to Ramirez' suite without being seen by the Senora Bryon, who was waiting for Ramirez to come out. As I did when I checked. And at last you would have found that Senor Bryon did go to Mexico City and his story was true.

"So"—and Calderone shrugged—"with the obvious suspects proved innocent, we would begin to look for the less obvious. Sooner or later, among those less obvious might be Fernando. He thought with the kind of shrewdness that will bring about his hanging. He thought if you died while checking on the obvious suspects, Senor Quist, I would naturally assume one of the obvious suspects had murdered you to keep you silent. So—he stabbed you in the darkness at the café, but you did not instantly die, and he saw the senora help you into the empty cinema. Had you by chance seen who stabbed you? If so, you would tell the senora. Better you should both die."

Calderone's eyes twinkled. "I think I might have received hints that Senor Bryon had killed you in a fit of jealousy."

"Which he almost did!" Alan said.

Charles Bryon flushed. "I was taking photographs in the square. I saw you and Angela go into the empty cinema. You both looked as if—well, as if you'd been drinking. I—I lost my head. But it took me some time to get there. I was on a rooftop across the square."

"And how did *you* get there, Calderone?" Alan asked.

"I have had you watched, senor, while I waited for the autopsy report."

Alan nodded slowly. "I still don't understand how Eric managed to fake the accident," he said. "Weren't there cars constantly passing? Weren't there spectators along the road?"

Eric smiled. "It was tricky," he said. "I had left the body down the bank from a short straight stretch, as you know, at the rise of a hill. Just beyond, about a half-mile, was a dangerous curve. Most of the spectators were gathered there. I stopped the car at the spot where the accident had to be. I got out, pretending I had engine trouble. One car passed. Then three others, bunched close together. I could see down the hill, and there was the gap I'd hoped for. There might be a minute or two before another car appeared. I turned my wheels, put the car in gear, and jumped." His hand shook a little as he lifted a cigarette to his mouth.

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"The car rolled over and over down the bank. I had to dive for cover behind some bushes as the next contestant came roaring along. As soon as he'd passed, I pulled Ramirez' body out of the thicket where I'd hidden it earlier and left it near the car. Then I had to dive for cover again as the next driver passed on the road above." Eric dragged smoke into his lungs. "Someone must have noticed the wreck and reported it at the next village. I didn't wait. I went off through the country as fast as I could, getting rid of my overalls and crash helmet in some woods."

"But how did you get here to Oaxaca?" Alan asked.

"After the last of the racing cars had gone through there was plenty of traffic," Eric said. "I hitch-hiked a ride with a truckload of peasants who were following the race here. They wouldn't have recognised me even if they were film-goers. My clothes were torn and my face was smeared with dirt."

"But the risk of being recognised at the starting point?"

"There was very little risk," Eric said. "With a crash helmet strapped under your chin, and with large goggles, just about your whole face is covered except your mouth. I just smiled and smiled and got in the car and drove off." He sighed. "And what happens now, Senor Calderone?"

"Under the law, senor, you and Senora Bryon are accessories to the crime. You helped to conceal it. I—well, I choose to take another view. You were attempting to conceal a crime that had not taken place: the murder of Ramirez by Senor Bryon. And so I choose to invent a tale for the courts which will place the blame for everything on our friend, Fernando."

"I still don't understand how Angela—" Charles Bryon began.

"Take the senora away, Senor Bryon," Calderone advised, "before she comes to know how little you understand about her." He took off his hat and bowed to Angela. "Good-bye, senora. It has been a pleasure to meet a woman with such devotion to a single male of the species."

The Bryons rose. Angela faced Alan for a moment, uneasily. Then she held out her hand in an almost boyish gesture. "Thank you and good-bye, Alan, and if you ever come to Vermont . . ."

"Thanks."

The Bryons left, and there was a long silence in the room. It was Calderone who broke it, his hand resting lightly on Alan's shoulder. "Such a woman will never change in her devotion, senor. She will protect her husband for the rest of his life against his own stupidity." His tone grew plaintive. "This is the thing we so deeply cherish in women, senor, but I ask you—why is it we never get one of this species for ourselves?"

★ ★ ★

HOME NOTES

Most husbands are generous to a fault—if the fault's their own.

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★ *R. J. J. Theakston, one of the runners-up in the recent Seafarers' Competition, went to sea at sixteen.*

As Chief Officer, he decided to marry and complete his education in New Zealand. Working his way out in command of a small ship, he arrived too late for the university year—so he is still in command! He has been writing stories for years, he says, and has had several of them broadcast in New Zealand. He is twenty-nine.

SILVER LINING

BY R. J. J. THEAKSTON

SLOWLY, majestically, the huge balloon rose into the air. In the basket Monsieur Henri Rocher and Monsieur Jean Peni, the celebrated meteorologists, gazed down on the gathering of friends and fellow scientists—including some of the most distinguished names in France—assembled to see them off on this daring voyage of scientific research.

The balloon gathered height. Madame Rocher and Madame Peni could be clearly seen, standing slightly apart from the others, each bravely waving a small, white handkerchief which she repeatedly and delicately dabbed at her eyes, for were not the newspapermen there also?

The two daring men saluted with emotion as the balloon drifted away from the launching field, across the road with its long line of carriages, and over the small wood.

"Now!" exclaimed Monsieur Rocher, as the edge of the wood was reached, and rolling green fields replaced the darker trees. Both men in the basket turned round to scan the ground beneath with powerful field-glasses.

"There they are! Look, Henri, by the fence!" shouted Monsieur Peni, pointing excitedly down at two gaily-dressed young ladies who were waving handkerchiefs with somewhat more abandon than Mesdames Rocher and Peni—which was, perhaps, only to be expected.

"Adèle, my beloved!" exclaimed Monsieur Rocher.

"Josephine, my adorable one!" sighed Monsieur Peni, blowing down ardent kisses.

But swiftly the balloon was carried up and past the young

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ladies, who soon could be seen only as tiny specks on the lush, green background of the Normandy countryside.

A little later the balloon reached the level of the clouds, cotton-wool puffs that stretched at a single level to the horizon. The scientists were busy noting temperatures, checking height, calculating dew points when they entered the first cloud.

Fair weather cumulus—developing—extent of vertical development . . . noted Monsieur Peni in his log book. He looked up to consult the barometer as the basket lifted clear of the cloud. Monsieur Peni looked down on the top of the cloud and blinked. He rubbed his eyes and looked again.

"Mon Dieu!" he gasped. "An angel!"

And, without doubt, it seemed as if he was right, for there, reclining comfortably in a corner of the cloud, was a figure dressed in a loose, white robe, a golden cord tied about his waist. His eyes were closed, and he was playing a flute.

At Monsieur Peni's exclamation the apparition looked up, and said in amazement, "Whatever are you doing up here?"

Miraculously the top of the cloud rose level with them, and the apparition peered into the basket. "It really is the limit," he continued, "when one is disturbed at home like this."

The two scientists stared in awed wonder. Monsieur Rocher was the first to speak. "You, monsieur, are an angel." It was a statement, for in Henri's mind there was no doubt even though, he noted with some surprise, the angel was wearing a red-and-white spotted scarf knotted about his neck.

Henri's angel grinned evilly. "Opinions differ about that," he said. He began to play the flute again, watching the two men from the corner of a wickedly glinting eye.

"In that case, sir, what are you?"

"I'm male—a male Malpon of the genus Cumuli. And thirsty as hell—got anything to drink?"

"Of course."

The two astonished men bent down together, reaching for their store of provisions. "Do you think he will do us any harm, Jean?" whispered Henri.

Jean shook his head and pulled out a bottle of wine. "Not after this," he whispered back, nodding at the wine. He stood up and drew the cork.

"Thanks," said the Malpon, taking the bottle. "Of course, you both know what a Malpon is?"

Henri spread his hands depreciatingly. "We are mere scientists, monsieur, and our knowledge of matters religious is apt to be slender."

The Malpon laughed. "Religious! That's a good one."

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He lifted the bottle to his red, perfectly-shaped lips, and drank deeply. The wine in the upturned bottle swirled and sank. "Whatever gives you that idea?" he inquired, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Why, monsieur, your appearance, of course. And your rather unusual situation in a cloud." Henri spoke in the respectful but firm manner a schoolmaster would use to explain the obvious to a prince. "I suppose you do a lot of good, Monsieur Malpon?"

"Good?" The Malpon looked blank—it was obviously an idea he had never contemplated. "Good? Whatever for?"

The scientists found this unanswerable.

Being meteorologists, they were intrigued by the Malpon's cloud, whose vertical development was keeping pace with their ascent. They consulted in whispers. They started to argue.

Suddenly Jean flung wide his arms, and shouted, "You know as well as I do, Henri, that the vertical development of the cumulus cloud depends upon convection and—"

"Something troubling you, gentlemen?" broke in the Malpon. He had by this time emptied the bottle, which had disappeared. He hiccuped gently.

"This cloud of yours, Monsieur Malpon. It is absurd. How can it rise with this balloon when the conditions are not favourable?"

The Malpon's eyes narrowed. "Give me another bottle, and I'll tell you all the answers," he said. He twitched his robe, and eased himself back into a more comfortable position on his fleecy bed.

The bottle changed hands.

The balloon rose.

The cumulus cloud rose.

"It's like this," began the Malpon, "you have the Cirrus Malpon, the Stratus Malpon, and—crême de la crême—the Cumulus Malpon." Here, from his horizontal position, he bowed slightly. "Each lives in his own type of cloud and is complete master of it. I can do as I wish with this cloud—" he paused, and swung a boastful arm in a grand gesture—"anything I like. You do not believe me?"

The meteorologists shook their heads. Their faces displayed polite, scientific disbelief. "Thunder, for instance? Can you conjure up a storm, with thunder and lightning?" inquired Jean mockingly.

Stung by their scepticism, the Malpon stood up, balanced himself unsteadily for a moment before spreading out his hands. Immediately, from the belly of the cloud flashed a vivid streak of

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lightning, followed by a clap of thunder that gradually subsided into low rumblings.

"How about that?" asked the Malpon triumphantly. "It's nothing like my best, of course," he added.

Pale-faced, the two men hung on tightly to the edge of the basket. They were, they supposed, about ten thousand feet up, in a balloon filled with hydrogen. One slight touch of lightning and . . .

They shuddered.

Seeing how he had impressed his audience, the Malpon sat down again. "It's easy when you're an expert," he said. "Like to see some rain? Or hail? I rather specialise in hail."

"Mais non! Please, Monsieur Malpon, we entreat you. No more!" implored the men. And then, more calmly, "But to what use do you put this great power?"

The Malpon thought for a moment. "Well," he said, "on washdays I have a little fun with showers. And lovers! Have you ever seen a pair of passionate lovers in a field in summer when it starts to pour with rain?"

The Malpon chuckled unpleasantly. "I teach 'em," he added virtuously.

"And what, pray, are your other gifts?" asked Monsieur Peni.

The Malpon scratched his head. "I have the power to tell when young girls are frightened by thunderstorms—quite an entertainment when one feels depressed—and I can make these cumulus clouds any colour. When I'm angry I prefer a nice black. And," he said, eyeing the scientists speculatively, "I can command a princely thirst."

Monsieur Rocher and Monsieur Peni exchanged glances. There was, they knew, one bottle of wine left. Would the Malpon become playful with a few bolts of lightning if they gave it him? they wondered. And should they entertain so heathen a personality? Supposing they . . .?

"Come on, you old hypocrites," urged the creature, "I know all about you and your mistresses." He began to examine his fingernails, from which, the scientists observed with horror, little flames of lightning were beginning to dance.

Henri lifted up the last bottle, holding it well above the edge of the basket.

The Malpon's eyes lit up, and he was reaching out eagerly when, with a grandiose gesture, Henri hurled the bottle down towards the earth.

Immediately there came a violent rush of wind that threw the balloon about like a small boat in a raging sea. The basket swung

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backwards and forwards, while the two men clung for dear life to the suspension lines.

Abruptly the squall passed.

Monsieur Peni and Monsieur Rocher peered gingerly over the edge of the basket to find the Malpon's cloud had completely vanished—below could be seen only a harmless sprinkling of fair weather cumuli, and beneath that again the smiling green of the countryside.

Jean mopped his brow. "Ten thousand devils! I trust our friend believed us when we said that was the last bottle. He has a taste for the wine, that one."

"No doubt he caught the bottle before it dropped too far," said Henri dryly.

With grave consideration they discussed the continuance of their journey. "Why go on," asked Jean, "when, firstly, we have no wine and, secondly, science has proved to be subject to the whims of unpredictable gentlemen like Monsieur C. Malpon?"

"But, obviously, that is why the weather is unpredictable, my dear Jean. As for the wine—a grave matter, I agree, but if we should land now, with this incredible story and no wine, our friends might link the two. No, mon ami, we will carry on."

Once more the intrepid scientists bent to their instruments.

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"The Skyscraper Window Cleaning Service say they haven't anyone answering that description working for them."

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EXCITING SHORT NOVEL

PETRELLA'S HOLIDAY

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE CONSTABLE on point duty in St. Andrew's Circus always has an exasperating time. And this is aggravated when the sun shines, since most of the traffic on the A.2 coastal road passes through the Circus, heading into it by three different routes, then squeezing out through the inadequate width of Vigo Street before attaining the comparative freedom of the Old Kent Road.

Constable Whitty was not only hot. He was rankling under the undeserved rebuke of Sergeant Mortimer. "Keep 'em moving," he muttered to himself. "How the hell can anyone keep 'em moving when there's nowhere for 'em to move to? If this was Russia, now, or America—" He visualised himself, revolver in holster, waving a stream of limousines down a four-track highway. "A hundred years out of date. That's what's wrong with this country. I *ask* you."

A small cart, drawn by a depressed pony, clattered slowly across the intersection, followed by a lorry with an articulated trailer, six girls on bicycles, and a hearse. Time to switch, thought Whitty. Roll on two o'clock!

He raised a hand to halt the oncoming car, turned and beckoned forward the head of the traffic waiting in St. Andrew's Road. A delivery van and an open car got smartly off the mark, followed by a saloon car. The van on the near side of the car stayed put. Whitty beckoned even more imperiously. The van failed to respond.

"Engine failure," diagnosed Whitty, "near the head of a line of traffic on a day like this. Why does everything happen to me?"

He strode up to the offending vehicle, which was an old, open-

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backed, Army fifteen-hundredweight truck, and thrust his head into the driver's compartment. " If you can't start her, you'll have to push her," he said.

Then he stopped. The man in the driver's seat was leaning across over the wheel, an empty look on his face, and a neat hole in the side of his forehead framed by a rim of fresh, bright blood.

Inspector Petrella, although he did not realise it at the time, had passed St. Andrew's Circus just before the shooting.

He had not gone through it, but had walked down Dunraven Street, which is separated from the Circus by a large blitzed site. As he went by, he had noticed a line of South Borough Secondary School boys hanging over the wall, and he had observed a game of cricket in progress. The players, as he saw out of the corner of his eye, were young men—indeed, not all that young—probably from the local printing works.

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The bowler, who had a shock of red hair, looked up, and it crossed Petrella's mind that he recognised him. He was on his way to an urgent appointment and had no time to stop, but he determined to have a word with Mr. Wetherall, who was the headmaster of South Borough Secondary School, and occupied the flat above Petrella's in Brinkman Road. Some of the blitzed sites were unsuitable playgrounds.

Petrella was on his way to a rendezvous with a man called Roper, who spent his mornings driving a delivery van, his evenings selling newspapers, and the whole of his time keeping his eyes and ears open. For he was a police informer, and one of the most valuable on Petrella's list. His charges were high, but his information was usually accurate.

Petrella waited, with professional patience, for a full hour, and when he stepped out again into the hot street a cruising police car located him and whipped him back to Gabriel Street. There he found his own superior, Superintendent Benjamin, and Benjamin's superior, Chief Superintendent Thom, in possession.

"I believe," said Thom—who was half an inch below the minimum height for a policeman, and known to every criminal south of the Thames as Pussy—"that you were using Roper yourself."

"That's right, sir. I was meeting him this lunch-time. He stood me up."

"He had some information for you?"

"He *said* he knew where the Borners kept their bank. He hadn't actually got round to talking terms."

"He'll not talk any more, now," said Thom. "He got an airgun bullet through the side of his head just before two o'clock. A right neat job. I don't know when I've seen a neater. We've got Roper. We've got his van. And about a thousand people to question. And that's all we have got."

"It'll be in all the evening papers," said Benjamin, who had a long, solemn face, and hated publicity of any sort. "It's probably on the streets by now."

"It's no bad thing if it is," said Thom. "We shall have to appeal for members of the public to come forward. We'll draft an announcement for the BBC."

"Where are you going to take the statements?" asked Petrella.

"I think we'll use this station," said Thom. "It's handiest, and the best place to see people will be in your office."

Petrella had feared as much.

Stimulated by appeals in the newspapers and on the wireless, the people of south-east London converged on Gabriel Street, for two whole days, in a steady stream. Some of them were cranks, some were liars, and a few of them had actually been in St. Andrew's Circus at the moment of the shooting.

Sergeant Shoesmith, whose methodical habits were invaluable in a crisis of this sort, produced a plan on an enormous scale, which he fastened to the wall, and on it he plotted, in distinctive colours,

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the position of every witness. In black, if their presence was unsupported; in green if they had been seen by one other person; in red if seen by two or more.

It was late in the afternoon on the first day that a young man arrived, produced an envelope, and tipped out of it a dozen photographs. "I'm from *The Clarion*," he said. "My editor thought you might like to see these. Interesting, aren't they?"

"I'll say they're interesting," said Petrella. "Where did you get them?"

"*The Clarion*'s running a series. Black Spots in London's Traffic. We did Charing Cross last week. This week it was St. Andrew's Circus. Rather a coincidence, really."

"Are these actually—?"

"The time of the shooting? Yes. We took one lot between twelve and two. Another lot between five and seven. The last one of the first series would be the one you'd want, I should think. Isn't that your chap, in fact?"

Petrella and Sergeant Shoesmith and Constable Wilmot crowded round the photograph. It was extraordinary. Like having a dream, and then seeing it all in the newspapers next morning. They carried the photograph across to the plan.

"There's that saloon car," said Petrella. "And you can see the nose of the bus, behind. That's Whitty. He's just signalling on the other line of traffic. Looks a bit hot, doesn't he?"

Sergeant Shoesmith said, "I always thought that man with the beard was a liar. He said he was standing under the clock from half past one to half past two. He isn't in any of the photographs at all. There's the little woman who thought it was Communists. And the man with the four dogs."

"Isn't that a bicycle?" said Petrella. "Look, you can just see the front of the mudguard." He looked at the plan. "That must be the schoolgirl. The one who thought she heard a shot. Just exactly where did you take these from? Can you show me on this plan?"

"It was an office," said the young man. "Our chaps usually work from windows. If you stand about on the pavement taking pictures you get a crowd round you. Just about there, I should say. It's a window on the first floor. He used a telescopic attachment. That's why the background's sharp but the foreground's a bit blurred."

"I think they're excellent photographs," said Petrella. "Can we hang on to them?"

"Certainly. We had these copies made for you. Only thing is, if you do get anything out of it, you might let us in on it."

Petrella promised to do that.

While Petrella, assisted by Sergeant Shoesmith and Detective Constable Wilmot, was sorting out the eye-witnesses, Superintendent Benjamin was inquiring into the movements of the Borners.

"Curly and me," said Maurice Borner, a handsome, dark-

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haired, young man with an arrogant Assyrian nose, "was playing snooker at Charley's. Copper was there, too. We started about one, and wasn't finished much before three."

"A long game?" suggested the Superintendent.

"That's the way it is," said Maurice, "when you get interested in a thing."

"Anyone else see you?"

"You know Charley's, Superintendent. It's sort of private. A few of us use it. I believe Sammy did look in."

Sam Borner, fatter than his brother and superficially jollier, agreed readily that he had looked in at Charley's. He had spent most of the lunch-hour in his flat with Harry and Nick. They had been having a quiet game of cards. They often had a quiet game of cards at lunch-time.

"It's as clear as the nose on Maurice's face," said Benjamin. "That's the lot that did it. It's not going to be easy to prove. No one's going to be keen on giving evidence against them. They carry too much weight."

"I know the two Borners," said Petrella. "Nick Joel, and Harry Hammanight—he's the big ex-sailor, isn't he? Who are the others?"

"Curly's one of the Bassets—the only one out at the moment. Copper's a redhead. He used to be quite a nice boy, and a promising boxer before they got hold of him."

Something in Petrella's memory stirred, but died.

"And it's all very fine," went on Benjamin, "for us to say we know the Borners did it because they'd got their knife into Roper and because they've got an alibi which is so watertight that it stinks—that's not going to cut much ice in Court. First thing we've got to find out is how it was done. What the hell are you grinning at?"

"I was just thinking," said Petrella, "that that's one of the finest mixed metaphors I've ever heard."

"Tchah," said Benjamin.

By the second evening Petrella and his assistants were contemplating a dwindling number of possibilities.

"I think," said Petrella, "that we could rule out anyone on the pavement. It would be much too risky."

"Suppose," said Wilmot, who was young and read detective stories, "they had this airgun disguised as an umbrella."

"Why would anyone carry an umbrella on a day like that?"

"Well, a walking-stick."

"It's no use supposing," said Petrella. "We *know* that no one was doing anything of the sort. We know everyone who was on the pavement, on both sides of the road, their names and addresses, and where they came from, and where they were going to. Do you suppose that any of them could have got away with pointing a walking-stick at Roper without half a dozen people noticing it?"

"I agree with you, sir," said Sergeant Shoesmith. "Our

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investigations have definitely ruled out the possibility of any of the passers-by being implicated, and the owners of all windows overlooking the scene have been checked and crosschecked."

"Suppose someone got on the roof, went up the fire escape—"

"And shot Roper through the top of the driver's seat without leaving a hole in it?"

"Roper could have been leaning out of the cab."

"He could have been," said Petrella patiently, because he liked Wilmot, "but how could the man on the roof know that he was going to lean out of the cab at just that place and time?"

"I'm inclined to think, sir," said Sergeant Shoesmith, "that it must have been a man in one of the other vehicles. We have established that Roper followed the same route almost every day on the way from his shop to the depot where he picked up his evening papers. And it was inevitable that he would be held up at St. Andrew's Circus. All he had to do was to draw up behind Roper, or beside him, shoot at the moment the traffic was signalled forward, and rely on getting away in the confusion."

"Splendid," said Petrella. "Splendid. Now tell me which of the vehicles you had in mind. We have succeeded in identifying them all, I think."

"Well," said Sergeant Shoesmith. "I admit that's a bit more difficult."

"There were only three possibles," said Petrella. "Unless the killing was done on the spur of the moment, the car *must* have been in the same stream of traffic as Roper. No one coming into St. Andrew's Circus from another direction could possibly guarantee to be at the head of one line at the precise moment Roper was near the head of the other. Right?"

"Right," said Wilmot. He enjoyed seeing Sergeant Shoesmith put in his place.

"And he must have been beside him, or in front of him. The shot couldn't have been delivered from behind. That brings us down to the delivery van immediately in front, the open car to the right front, or the saloon car, level with Roper on the right. We know who they are. They've all come forward, none of them has the faintest connection with Roper, and none of them looks in the least like a murderer. Apart from that—" Petrella prodded a document on the table in front of them—"we've now got the results of the laboratory tests, which show that the bullet went into Roper from the lefthand side, either on the level, or from very slightly above—it would depend on how he was holding his head at the moment of impact. Which makes complete nonsense of the idea that he was shot from a van in front, or from a car much lower than he was and on his right."

"That's right," said Wilmot again. "Real tricky, this one."

"It's no good just saying it's tricky," said Petrella crossly. "We've got to find the answer to it. There's no arguing away the fact that someone put a bullet into Roper's head. He didn't shoot himself."

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It occurred to Petrella afterwards that the reason they couldn't see the answer was because they were too near the problem. He took all the photographs home with him that night, and propped them round the teapot while he ate the evening meal he had cooked for himself. And when he went upstairs afterwards to chat with Mr. Wetherall, he took the photographs with him.

Mr. Wetherall, the reigning headmaster of the South Borough Secondary School, was a neat, grizzled man, with a nose reminiscent of the great Duke of Wellington and an all-embracing knowledge of the characters and habits of the south Londoners whom he had taught, as boys, for thirty years, and successive generations of whom he had watched grow up into tough, unpredictable, cheerful, amoral citizens.

"I have no faith," he said, "in amateur detectives who step in where the professional has failed, but if you wouldn't mind handing me that magnifying glass—it is rather a fine one, isn't it? Young Simmonds gave it to me when he left. You may know his father."

Petrella knew Mr. Simmonds well: he was the second most eminent receiver of stolen goods in South Borough.

"This is the photograph that was taken at the moment of the shooting? And the others at short intervals before it?" Mr. Wetherall pored over the photographs, occasionally chuckling to himself as he recognised an ex-pupil in the crowd.

Then he straightened up and said, "Well, really. I'm quite sure you've noticed it for yourself, but that young lady—the one in the final photograph, she appears to be smoking a cigarette. Odd, don't you think, that she isn't doing so in any of the earlier ones? Significant, perhaps?"

"Which young lady?"

"No. Not in the crowd. I mean the young lady in the advertisement on the hoarding. The one advertising SUDDO. *Make Monday Fun-day.*"

Petrella snatched the glass, and focused it. Then, with fingers that fumbled, he grabbed the other photographs and concentrated on each in turn.

What Mr. Wetherall had said was absolutely true. The young housewife, holding aloft a snowy-white garment, and announcing with a dazzling smile that Monday was Fun-day had, between her teeth, *in the final photograph only*, a thin, cylindrical object not unlike a large cigarette.

Early next morning he sought out Mr. Cooper, who was agent for the owner of the bombed site which fronted on St. Andrew's Circus, masked at that side by hoardings, and which ran clear back, behind the hoardings, to Dunraven Street.

"I put this barbed wire up a day or two ago," said Mr. Cooper. "I heard people had been getting down into the site, at the back, playing cricket. We've never had any trouble before. Do you want to go down yourself? It's a bit of a climb."

"See if you can borrow a ladder," said Petrella, "while I

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shift some of this wire." Half an hour later, with the assistance of a signpainter's ladder, they were standing on what had once been the basement floor of a large building.

"If you don't mind," said Petrella, "I'll do this bit alone. I don't want any unnecessary footprints."

Mr. Cooper looked at him curiously, and said, "This something to do with the shooting the other day?"

"It might be," said Petrella. "Why?"

"I did wonder why anyone would want to climb down here just to play cricket. You can see for yourself. It'd be an awkward place to get at, even without the wire. I suppose I ought to have said something before."

"Yes," said Petrella. "But don't blame yourself. I actually saw them playing, and it didn't occur to me, either. Hold the ladder, would you mind?"

He climbed on the back wall, and made his way across a weed-grown ground floor. Then there was a girder to cross. It had originally been two buildings, he guessed, back to back; one fronting on Dunraven Street, the other on St. Andrew's Circus. He was now in what was left of the larger one. The line of hoardings was above him, their footings at eye level.

Behind them ran the wall which the local authority had put up immediately after the bombing, to prevent people falling into the hole. Petrella looked at the wall cautiously. There was no obvious way up on to it, but there was a pile of rubble at one end which would offer a starting place. And, at the base of the rubble, faint but still distinct, a footprint. Petrella regarded it as lovingly as Robinson Crusoe gazed at the print of Man Friday.

Lucky we haven't had any rain, he thought. Get something to cover it. And have a cast made quick. Better tackle the wall from the other end.

He went back the way he had come, pulled up the ladder, and returned with it to the hoarding. Using a ladder, it was possible to avoid setting foot on the coping at all. He tried to visualise the photographs. Which had been the Suddo advertisement? There was the beer poster on the left. Then the petrol hoarding. Was Suddo next, or next but one?

It was such a neat job that, even knowing what he was looking for, it took Petrella five minutes to find it. A section, twelve inches long by four inches high, had been cut from the woodwork of the hoarding—and cut so neatly that it fitted without any sort of fastening. Petrella prised it out with his fingernails. The space in front of it was blocked by the back of the poster, but a narrow slit had been cut in the paper and pasted over from the back.

Petrella opened it with the tip of his finger, and found himself looking at the face of a bus driver, fifteen feet away and almost exactly on a level with his own.

"It was an ambush," said Petrella to Benjamin. "They knew he went through the Circus every day about that time. Of course,

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they were bound to be seen getting into the site at the back. They covered that by five of them playing lunch-hour cricket while Maurice did the shooting."

"Bit risky," said Benjamin. "Suppose a policeman had gone by and recognised them."

Petrella was still young enough to blush.

He said, "One did. I actually saw them playing, and thought I recognised the one I looked at—it was Copper Dixon, the redhead. I'd seen him once before, in Court. It should have clicked, but it didn't."

"I see," said Benjamin. "All the same, you should be able to identify him when the time comes. What about the boys?"

"In the ordinary way, I don't expect they'd be keen to give evidence at all, but Mr. Wetherall—he's their headmaster—tells me that one of them is an Irish boy called O'Connor. The South Bank Irish don't like the Borners. It's a piece of local politics. I don't know the ins and outs of it, but he thinks that O'Connor will give evidence. And if he does, the other boys will follow his lead."

"And they saw Maurice actually climbing down, out of the back part of the building?"

"That's what O'Connor says. And we've got one clear footprint in the rubble he stepped on to get up. And three fairly clear ones on the ledge. That could be useful."

"Unless he's thrown that pair of boots into the river," said Benjamin. "But he may not have done. Even professional criminals make mistakes."

He was turning it all over as he spoke. Petrella would make a good witness, but he had seen only one man. The boys had seen all six, but were dangerous people to put into the box. Scientific evidence of the shoe marks. That might be conclusive. Juries love a bit of science.

"I'll try it on the Director of Public Prosecutions," he said at last. "And see what he thinks."

The case of the Queen against Borner and Others was news at all its stages. The ingenious and cold-blooded killing had caught the public attention. Even the hearing in the Magistrates Court produced its quota of sensations.

Such proceedings are often a mere formality, a skirmish preliminary to the main battle at the Old Bailey. But in this case it was clear that the opposition meant to fight the whole way. Maurice Borner was defended by Mr. Walter Frenchman, Q.C., who was old, fat, and experienced; the remaining five by Mr. Michael Harsch, an up-and-coming young criminal advocate of considerable ability.

Thinking things over afterwards, Petrella came to the conclusion that, although he disliked young Mr. Harsch with all his heart, it was old Mr. Frenchman who had done the damage. Mr. Harsch had been too open in his dislike of the police. He had played too

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obviously to the public gallery. But some of the mud that he slung had seemed to stick.

It had not, for instance, taken him long to ferret out the fact that Petrella occupied the flat below Mr. Wetherall, from whose school most of the witnesses came, and he had built upon this fact an impressive edifice of falsehood and collusion.

"And now, Inspector," said Mr. Harsch, when he had exhausted this agreeable topic. "Now we come to the occasion—the remarkable occasion—on which you failed to recognise one of my clients, Mr. Dixon, when you saw him, as is alleged, indulging in a game of cricket, but yet had no difficulty in recognising him afterwards, when it suited your superior officers that you should do so."

This did not appear to need an answer but, as Mr. Harsch had paused for breath, Petrella said, "Yes."

"You agree that it was extraordinary?"

"Do I agree that what was extraordinary?"

"That you failed to recognise this man when you first saw him."

"I recognised him," said Petrella, "but failed to place him."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I recognised his face, but failed to recall his name—at the time."

"When had you seen him before?"

This was a fast one. If Petrella had said, as he very nearly did, "In this Court, a month before," it would have been a grave technical error. He blocked it by saying, "I had seen him some time before."

"And how did you recognise him afterwards?"

"Afterwards I was shown certain photographs, and saw the accused himself, and recognised him as the man I had seen."

"In fact, you conveniently recognised him when pressed to do so later."

"Certainly not."

"And you are quite sure that the man you saw, and failed to recognise, was the same as the man you saw later and succeeded in recognising?"

"Oh yes."

"You have, if I may say so, a conveniently selective memory."

Petrella was glad to recall, however, that Mr. Harsch had not had things all his own way. Next in the witness box was Mr. Wetherall, called to speak to the character of the boys concerned.

It was, perhaps, rash of Mr. Harsch to cross-examine, but he had not yet learnt when to let well alone. "I suggest, Mr. Wetherall," he said, "that in a natural desire to speak well of your boys, you have been inclined to somewhat over-estimate their truthfulness and powers of observation."

"I'm sorry, Harsch," said Mr. Wetherall, "that you should so soon have forgotten the elementary rules of grammar which I tried for four years to drum into your head. There is no excuse, even in a court of law, for splitting an infinitive."

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The press had liked this—COUNSEL REBUKED BY OWN HEADMASTER. They had liked it a good deal more than Mr. Harsch himself. Most of his friends at the Bar believed he had been to Marlborough.

Petrella was told that he had behaved himself quite well. In retrospect he was glad of it. There were moments that afternoon when he had despised, in the person of the sleek, young advocate, the whole British judicial system. He had been forewarned what to expect, and was tolerably equipped to deal with it. At the worst it had been a wasted and frustrating afternoon.

But what was a young policeman, whose talents lay in the physical apprehension of criminals, to make of the dialectical hair-splitting of men like Mr. Harsch? And why, in the name of sanity, did the newspapers invariably select for their headline every point made *against* the police—DETECTIVE HAD CONVENIENT MEMORY, SAYS BARRISTER—and as invariably omit the occasions on which the Magistrate concluded the case by exonerating the officer concerned of the suggestions made against him?

Was it because the insults were news and the compliments were not? Or was it, perhaps, because the reporter concerned had been fined forty shillings for a parking offence the month before, and now saw an easy chance of getting his own back?

But these matters were not important. They were pinpricks in comparison with the disaster that had followed.

At the conclusion of the prosecution's case the Magistrate had, with apparent reluctance, committed the six men for trial at the Central Criminal Court, but had then been guilty of the outrageous folly, at Mr. Frenchman's request and in the face of the strongest police pressure, of releasing all but Maurice Borner on bail. Useless to point out, as Benjamin did, his long face white with fury, that the backbone of the prosecution's case, so far as the five were concerned, was likely to be the evidence of schoolboys. And that if the gang was allowed to go free between the preliminary hearing and the trial of the case, there would very likely be no case at all. The Magistrate had listened, but with a shut mind.

"I might as well have been talking to the backside of my own car," said Benjamin. "If he wants every one of those boys to tell a different story—or no story at all—by the time they get to the Old Bailey, he's going the right way about it."

"Curse the lot of them," said Petrella, sitting on the edge of his bed on a fine September morning, and swinging pyjama'd legs. It was ten o'clock. But somehow he felt disinclined to get up at all. Nor was there any need for him to get up if he did not want to. For he was on holiday.

It was not a holiday that he had sought, for he had no wish to leave Gabriel Street until the Borner affair was settled, but two days earlier Superintendent Benjamin had given him a direct order.

"We've got a bit of a breathing space," he said, "before the

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case comes on at the Bailey. It can't be in the calendar before October. You're to go off and treat yourself to a holiday."

When Petrella looked mutinous, he had added, "I'm not thinking of you. I'm thinking of myself. If you don't take a breather now, you won't last out the winter. We're too understaffed for me to allow you more than ten days, but ten days you'll take, whether you like it or not."

Petrella had not even the excuse that there was nowhere for him to go. Colonel Montefiore, an aged relative of his mother, had given him an open but explicit invitation to stay at his home in the Chilterns whenever Petrella felt inclined. "Bring old clothes. I can lend you a gun. And you can have your breakfast in bed every day," wrote the Colonel. "And forget about criminals. The only criminals we have round here are poachers, and they're all my friends."

Two days ago the prospect had been attractive. Now, somehow, Petrella was not sure. He felt tired and irritable. At the same time restless, but disinclined for action. He pulled on a dressing-gown, and wandered across to the window.

Summer was still to all appearances in full swing. The trees were heavy with leaves, and the sky was blue. A warm summer wind was driving ice-cream cartons and scraps of paper along the pavement. In spite of the sun Petrella shivered. His mouth was dry and his feet were cold. He felt disinclined for food, but thought that a cup of strong coffee might do him good.

He was to take the afternoon train, and a bag, half packed, lay on the floor beside his bed. It occurred to him that he was ill-equipped for a visit to the country. It was all very well for the Colonel to talk about old clothes. There were standards to be observed. He would have to do some shopping.

An hour later he left the house. It was a glorious day, and the sun struck down through the leaves. He thought that a gentle walk might do him good, and he set off along Brinkman Road.

He stopped at Spinks', in the Broadway, and bought himself half a dozen handkerchiefs, but thought that Spinks' widely-advertised line in Gent's Genuine Norfolk Jackets was hardly what the Chilterns would expect. He would have to visit the West End to get what he wanted. He decided that the quickest way, at that time of day, would be to cut across to the Surrey Docks Underground Station.

Childers Street is a long and uninspiring thoroughfare. Towards its far end it swings sharply to the right into River Street. Petrella had an idea that, if he kept straight on, there was a back way which must bring him out somewhere near the Docks Station. He realised that he was wrong when the tiny street he was using degenerated into a passage between walls of houses, and ended in a pair of heavy gates which were standing open.

Out of obstinacy he went on through the gates, and found himself on a triangular, cobbled quay which sloped down to the bank of the Surrey Union Canal. The edge of the quay was

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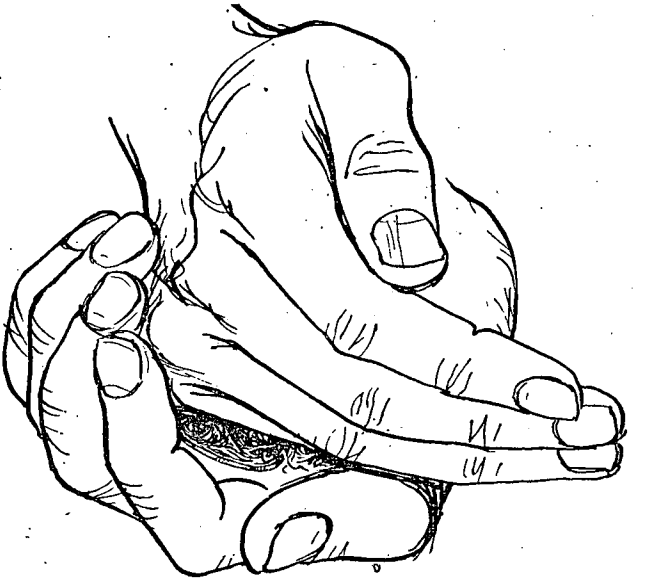

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equipped with a line of iron bollards, and sitting on one of the bollards, smoking a short pipe, was a brown-faced, white-bearded man, whom Petrella recognised.

"Why, hullo, Doctor," said Petrella, "this is a pleasant surprise."

"Good morning, Inspector," said the old man. "Come to inspect my boat?"

"I don't know that I ought—"

The old man looked at him and said, "You look as if a drink wouldn't do you any harm."

His barge, the *Journey's End*, was tied up, fore and aft, to the quay. They stepped on to her iron-plated deck, and made their way astern to the scuttle, which led down into the owner's living-quarters, sleeping-quarters, and tiny galley. It looked beautifully snug. Petrella sat down on the spare bunk and watched the doctor pottering about with a percolator, a packet of sugar, a saucepan of milk, and two mugs.

It all took a long time, and before the coffee was ready it seemed to Petrella that he must have slept and woken again. He looked up to see the doctor standing in front of him, a china mug in one hand and a puzzled look on his face.

"You all right, son?"

"Of course I'm all right," said Petrella.

His own voice sounded thick and faraway. "A bit tired, that's all. But I'll be all right. I'm starting my holiday today."

"Let's see you on your feet."

Petrella started to get up. Then the barge was no longer tied up. It tilted alarmingly. He reached out, and caught the edge of the table to steady himself. There was a heavy sea running. And a curtain of mist floated in front of his eyes. Odd that the weather should change so quickly. At that moment he lost hold of the edge of the table, and before he could steady himself the whole barge had tilted back again, and deposited him on the bunk. Then the mist dropped down.

The owner of the *Journey's End* stood for a moment, peering at this young man who had called to drink a cup of his coffee and had passed out on his spare bunk. Up and down the waterfronts, docksides, and canals of south London, people called him "Doctor." In twenty years it had grown to be a sort of courtesy title. Few people realised that he was, in fact, a qualified doctor, and a man of considerable, if curious, attainments.

He laid his hand on Petrella's forehead, which was damp and hot, felt his pulse, and listened for a moment to his breathing. Then he unlaced Petrella's shoes and took them off, removed his coat and waistcoat, collar and tie, pulled a pillow from his own bunk and put it under the young man's head, and covered him with a couple of rugs.

Minutes, or hours, later Petrella opened his eyes and tried to sit up. The old man jumped up out of his chair and came across.

"See if you can drink this," he said. It was a tumbler of water,

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into which he dropped a couple of white tablets. "I didn't try to push 'em down your throat when you were out. I've seen people choke that way."

"What is it? What's up?" said Petrella. "Did I pass out?"

"My guess is you've got flu, and a high temperature," said the old man. "Did you say you were starting a holiday?"

"That's right," said Petrella. "Ten days' holiday." He drank up the glass, and went to sleep again. It was a hot, black-and-red sleep, a sleep of aching bones and bad dreams, in which he was endlessly cross-examined by a crocodile in a stuff gown who alternately snapped its yellow teeth and wept over him.

When he finally opened his eyes and started on the slow and difficult job of working out where he was, the first thing he noticed was that they really were afloat. No wild and illusory lurching this time, but a gentle, pleasant pitching of the great, iron coffin in which he lay. He sat up in the bunk too quickly. And lay back again while the world stopped spinning.

Then he propped himself up more cautiously on his elbow and looked round. On the fixed table, in reach of his arm, was a tumbler of water. He picked it up, drained it, was conscious of a bitter, not unpleasant taste, and fell asleep again almost before his head was on the pillow . . .

When he woke next it was night. The cabin was lit by the warm and cosy glow of a paraffin lamp. As he stirred, the doctor got up from behind the table and came over to him.

Petrella found that his head was quite clear. "I'm afraid," he said, "I've been a bit of a nuisance."

"Far from it. I've never had a more docile patient."

"How long have I been here?"

The doctor counted on his fingers. "Two days," he said. "And a little over ten hours."

"Good God." It is always startling when a tiny segment of life goes by default.

"You said you were starting a holiday. I saw no reason why you shouldn't have it on my barge, under the care of a medical practitioner. Qualified, if a bit rusty."

"It's very kind of you," said Petrella. "I was going to stay with my mother's cousin. He'll be having a fit."

"We'll send him a telegram first thing tomorrow morning."

"Where are we? And how did we get here?"

"If you ask too many questions," said the doctor, "you'll put your temperature up again. We're in a stretch of water called the Long Neck, just below Walton. We came here via Greenland Dock, Russia Dock, Lavender Pond, and the open river. Now go to sleep."

When Petrella woke next morning, he felt ravenously hungry and knew that he was well again. After breakfast the doctor went ashore to dispatch a telegram to Colonel Montefiore, at Blagdens Wake, Nettlebed. He wrote it out and handed it, with some misgiving, over the counter of a tiny village shop which called

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itself a sub post office. His misgivings were entirely justified, for it never reached its destination, though a Colonel Mount-ferry of Nettlebed House, Bannockburn, did receive, some weeks later, a telegram which said:

Taken ill suddenly. Will write. Patrick.

The six days that followed were, without any exception, the best that Petrella could remember.

He was steady on his feet by the evening of the first day, and strong enough next morning to help the doctor about the simple manoeuvres of his craft.

He learnt to operate lock gates with a handle like a huge grandfather clock-key which lived in the barge's engine-room, to steer for long, slow miles through a forgotten waterway, where they might not see a house for hours at a stretch, and their only visitors would be the bullocks who would gallop to the hedges when they heard the *Journey's End* coming, and stand, breathing hard and rolling their frightened, curious eyes until her iron bulk vanished round a bend or under one of the low, stone bridges which had so little headroom that it seemed impossible she should squeeze through them at all.

He learnt to tend the wants of the Diesel engine which drove them forward, to trim and fill the paraffin lamps, and to peel potatoes. But it was the evenings he enjoyed most. When the barge was safely tied up, and the lamps were lit; when supper had been eaten and washed up and stacked away, and they settled down to talk before going to bed.

He heard from the doctor something of his curious life. "I was fifty," said the old man. "It was actually my fiftieth birthday, when I stopped being a doctor and became a bargemaster. I'd made quite a lot of money. Those were days when your patients came to you because they liked and trusted you, not because the Government told them to, and a man who was successful in his line could make a reasonable amount of money. I was unmarried, and I calculated that I had enough banked away to keep a man of my frugal habits in comfort for the best part of a century.

"That day I was called to the house of a man I knew well. He was a businessman. Not a tycoon, you understand, just a pleasant person who worked and worried from morning to night to support an expensive wife and three gold-plated children.

"When I reached the house he was dead. Thrombosis. A less fashionable complaint then than it is now. I shut my surgery that very day, sold my practice, and bought the *Journey's End*.

"It's the only decision in my life I've never regretted. I make enough by doing odd jobs to cover running expenses. Sometimes I hear from my stockbroker that my investments have gone up again. I never touch them. When I die they'll go to my old medical school."

It wasn't until the evening of the fourth day that Petrella thought to inquire where they were going. He discovered that their destination was some miles short of Basingstoke, where they were

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delivering a grand piano, and some harvesting machinery, and picking up two ponies.

It was on the way back that Petrella told the doctor the whole story of the Borners and Roper from beginning to end, and the old man listened in absorbed and judicious silence. He interrupted only once to say, "I knew Copper. He helped me with the barge. He was a nice boy, but too easily led." And at the end of it all he said, "You sound bitter about it. Why?"

"I did feel bitter about it," said Petrella. "I'm all right now. It was just that in the police we do a lot of work, and take a few risks and a few knocks in the interests of law and order, and one would think the law would be on our side."

"The law's on no one's side," said the doctor. "Once it's on anyone's side, it stops being law at all and becomes something cooked up by the politicians."

"Yes, but—" said Petrella.

"If you had the law behind you in the sense that it supported you whatever you did, right or wrong, you'd degenerate into a state security force. Like the Gestapo."

Petrella said mutinously, "I bet when the Gestapo caught half a dozen dangerous thugs the magistrate didn't let *them* out on bail."

Unknown to Petrella, while the *Journey's End* was nosing her calm path among the water lilies of the Basingstoke and south-western Canal, in South Borough events were on the move.

On the morning following Petrella's departure, Mr. Wetherall called on Superintendent Benjamin.

"Patrick and I are great friends," he said. "And I knocked on his door this morning to see if he'd gone. To tell you the truth, I wouldn't have been surprised to find him laid up. He hasn't been looking at all well lately. His room was empty, but there was a suitcase, which he'd obviously been meaning to take with him, on the floor, half packed."

Benjamin had troubles of his own. He said, "He may have been short of time. Suppose it was a question of coming back for his bag or catching the train? Or something like that."

"It doesn't sound like him," said Wetherall. "The breakfast things weren't washed up, either."

"If you're really worried," said Benjamin, "I could get in touch with the people he's meant to be staying with. He left a telephone number."

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," said Mr. Wetherall.

However, no one was put to any trouble. For at that moment, Colonel Montefiore came through himself.

"Mistake?" he said. "Of course there's no mistake. Patrick told us exactly which train he would catch. I assumed, when he failed to arrive, that he must be ill in bed at home. I think someone should go and see."

Benjamin said he would do what he could, and turned a now worried face to Mr. Wetherall. "There's quite a few things

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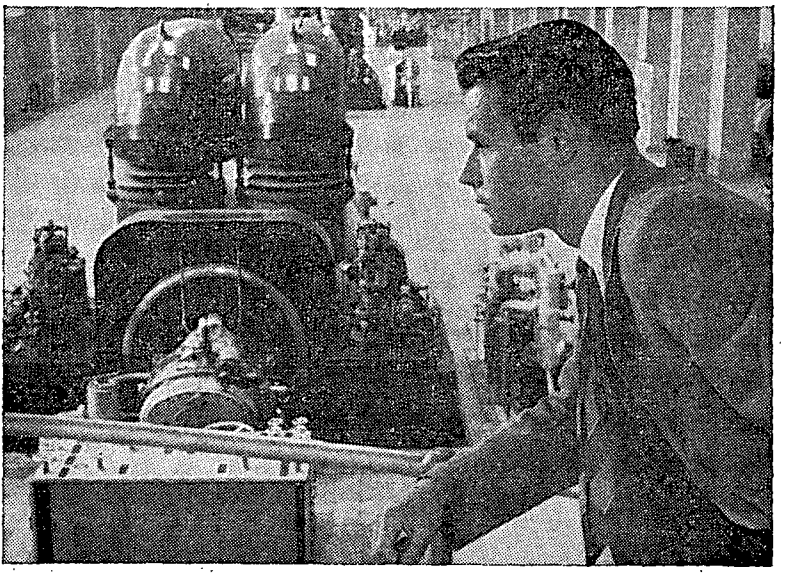

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might have happened," he said. "His holiday's his own affair. He could have changed his mind about where he was going. I'll have inquiries made, but we don't want to start a fuss about nothing. Things are rather upset round here as it is."

Mr. Wetherall swears that he said nothing. On the contrary, he asserts that it was one of his own boys that told *him* the news.

"You know that Inspector," said Martin, who was head of the school that year, and a privileged character. "The young one—Petrella. I heard the Borners done him. They coshed him the night before last. And dropped his body in the canal."

"Where on earth did you hear that?"

"Everyone knows it," said Martin. "What we reckon is, they'll be after Mike and Terry and the others next. Bound to be. After all, *they're* witnesses, too, aren't they? Some of the boys are forming a vigilant committee—a sort of escort—to protect them till the trial comes on. A good idea, I think, don't you, sir?"

"Good heavens," said Mr. Wetherall. "It's a terrible idea." He cast his mind over the names of the boys concerned. Of the six who had come forward, the leaders had been Mike O'Connor and Terry Shane, both Irish boys, and both members of the large Irish Colony which centred on Stafford Street, Latimer Street, and Cutaway Lane.

He remembered hearing that there had been bad blood, even before the Roper killing, between the Borners and the Irish. Something that someone had said in a pub, which had ended in broken glass and blood, and had been stored in the retentive Irish memory. If the Borners and their supporters got it into their heads that O'Connor and Shane were giving evidence out of spite—and if the school got involved—he pictured a battlefield strewn with South Borough Secondary School corpses, and hurried round once again to the Police Station.

He found that the news had run ahead of him.

"I can't get anything reliable," growled Benjamin. "There's talk of him being seen in Childers Road, and I'm having the bank of the canal there searched. As a precaution, you understand."

"But it's four days now," said Mr. Wetherall. "And he's not what you'd call an inconsiderate young man. Even if he'd gone off—"

Then he saw that Benjamin was as worried as he was.

That afternoon a police constable picked up a paper bag, with six new handkerchiefs in it, on the wharf at the end of Childers Road. The handkerchiefs were new, and there was an invoice with them, and the invoice had a number on it which indicated the assistant at Spinks' who had made the sale. She remembered Petrella and described him with an accuracy which suggested she had looked at him more than once. "Dark black hair, young-looking, a brown face, very deep blue eyes." She also remembered the raincoat he was wearing; and the fact that he had looked a bit under the weather.

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Benjamin gave orders for a search of that section of the Surrey Canal. And sent an urgent message to Chief Superintendent Thom at District. Dragging operations were carried on by arc lamp all that night; and the next morning a team of frogmen was called in.

More than a hundred South Borough boys were late for school that morning, having stopped to watch the operation, and in the first break O'Connor addressed a mass meeting of his schoolfellows. He was a thick, stocky, snub-nosed boy with sun-bleached hair, and like all Southern Irishmen he had a grasp of the essentials of mob oratory.

Mr. Wetherall read the portents, and telephoned Superintendent Benjamin, who was even then in conference with his superiors.

"There'll likely be trouble," said Dory, a slow-spoken man, who was in charge of the whole of the Division, both uniformed and detective branches. "We'll need a few extra men to carry out a proper search for Petrella. I think I'll ask for them now, just in case."

"It's the boys," said Benjamin. "They've got it into their heads that the Borners have knocked off Petrella to stop him giving evidence. It's a short step from that to the idea that they're planning to knock off the other witnesses, too."

"And you don't believe it?" said Thom.

"No, I don't," said Benjamin. "It's out of character. I'm afraid something may have happened to Petrella. He was looking pretty rotten. Suppose he passed out and slipped into the canal. Or he may just have lost his memory. But I don't believe anyone, even that gang, would be silly enough to knock off a witness, in cold blood. And remember, to make sense of it they've got to get rid of seven or eight boys as well."

He wondered, afterwards, if he had been arguing to convince himself.

It was on the following evening, the sixth after Petrella's disappearance, that the fight occurred in Basset Street. No one quite knew how it started. The fact that it was half past nine suggested that Copper Dixon and Curly had been drinking, but the provocation seemed to have come from a group of schoolboys who had no business to be out at that hour. It ended in Copper losing two teeth from a thrown milk bottle and Terry Shane breaking his wrist in the scuffle that followed. A car load of policemen cleared the streets.

Terry Shane's father was not the person to allow an assault on his son to go unanswered. Micky Shane had had a distinguished career in the all-in wrestling ring, where his speciality had been bouncing his opponents on their heads. He was now growing fat, and a little out of training, but he commanded a considerable following in the Stafford Street area, and on the following evening a party consisting of eight or ten Irishmen paid a visit to the Six Bells, in Carver Street, which was known to be a stronghold of the Borners. Copper, who was the only one of the gang present, got

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out by a back door, and the Irishmen spent a pleasant ten minutes wrecking the Saloon Bar.

It is just possible that, left to themselves, the two factions might have felt honour was now satisfied, and called it a day.

The Borners and their mob of followers were beginning to show signs of nervousness. As long as the mob was in being, a powerful and flourishing entity, people had touched their hats to it out of fear of reprisals. Under the stress of circumstances, it was beginning to fall apart.

Had the boys of South Borough Secondary School been prepared to let the matter drop, it might have simmered down.

But they were not. On the contrary. Like harbingers of strife, the black-and-red caps blew before the storm, and where they went, fresh trouble was born.

The ninth evening after Petrella's disappearance was warm, even for September. Quiet, overcast, and still. Sammy Borner thought that he would pass the time with a game of snooker with the boys at Charley's. He left his car in the back street outside the entrance to the club, which was in a basement, and approached by a flight of iron steps. When he came out an hour later he found that all his tyres were flat. Not just one, but all four. He also observed five or six boys, one of them a chunky youth with light hair, standing on the pavement, their hands in their pockets, looking at nothing in particular.

"You do this?" he inquired.

"That's right," said the chunky boy, and added, "bloody murderer."

Sammy hesitated for a moment, but the arrival of his friends, Harry, Curly, Copper, and Nick, who were leaving the club at the same time, gave him a feeling of solidarity.

The opposition, after all, was only five schoolboys. They had earned a lesson. Sammy ducked into the back of the car, picked up a jack handle, and moved forward. The chunky boy whistled shrilly, and the next moment the street was full of boys and men.

The riot call reached Dory at Borough High Street Police Station, where he was in conference with Benjamin.

"The Irish have got Sammy Borner and his friends holed up in a snooker cellar in Parton Street," he said. "There's been a bit of bloodshed. If they get their hands on them, in their present temper, they'll finish them."

"And that," said Benjamin, "would break my heart."

Dory was already giving his orders.

Two squad cars and a tender reached the corner of Parton Street together. The air was full of the noise of battle and breaking glass.

"Sounds quite a party," said Dory. He marshalled his forces. "Ben, you stay here with four men, and keep them away from the cars." And when Benjamin protested, "In a mess-up like this, a uniform's worth more than a good character." He arranged the

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eight men he had chosen into careful formation. "Front two link arms with me," he said. "Use your feet if you have to. And keep together."

They went round the corner like a human tank. It took them sixty highly-coloured seconds to reach the billiard saloon, to push aside the table which was up-ended against the door, and to replace it behind them.

They found four badly-frightened men, and a fifth lying on his face in a pool of blood.

"We're in," said Dory. "But that's not to say we'll get out again. They'll be expecting us this time. Wainwright, go and see if you can find a back door or a window or something. Who's this?"

"It's Curly," said Sammy Borner. He looked as if he had been crying. "They've killed him. You've got to do something."

"We're none of us dead yet," said Dory.

There was a splintering crash from the street. The crowd had tipped Sammy's car up on to one side and over into the mouth of the area. The smell of spilt petrol filled the air.

"There *is* a window, sir," said Wainwright. "But it opens into a sort of little closed yard."

"I don't care if it opens into the back of beyond," said Dory. "So long as it leads somewhere. Hughes and Gavigan, carry this man. And don't drop him. We want him in one piece. Now let's get going."

The window was barely large enough. As they manhandled Curly through, there came from the room they had left a muffled explosion followed by the white glare of detonated petrol.

Dory reformed his force in the courtyard. "Soon as we get round the corner," he said, "we'll be in sight. Make straight for the cars, and don't stop for anything."

Once again the power of united effort, and the drive of a man who knew his own mind, prevailed against disorganised numbers. They tumbled into the cars.

"Make for Gabriel Street," said Dory. "It'll give them farther to go if they come after us."

"They're coming all right," said Benjamin. "So's the Fire Brigade." As they rounded the corner, they heard the bells of the first fire engine.

The *Journey's End* tied up at the Camberwell basin and Petrella climbed ashore. The sky was coal-black and threatening.

"Lucky you've got a mackintosh," said the doctor. "Rain soon, and plenty of it, if I'm any judge."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Petrella. "It's been the finest holiday I've ever had."

"Nothing to thank me for," said the doctor. "I've enjoyed having you along. Come again soon."

Petrella said he would; but he knew, even then, that no other trip would be quite like that first one.

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He climbed the steps from the dockside up to the level of the Camberwell Road. His first idea was to take a bus home. When he saw the glow in the sky to the north-west, and heard the sound of the fire bells, he changed his mind. He thought he would make first for Gabriel Street, to pick up the news. It was less than ten minutes' quick walk.

He had covered half the distance when, with spectacular suddenness, the heavens were opened and the rain came down. Petrella buttoned up the neck of his mackintosh, and broke into a jog trot . . .

Benjamin and Dory were standing in the first-storey window of Gabriel Street, looking out at the crowd which filled the short approach road. The crowd was mostly men, with a scattering of boys. It was not doing anything in particular.

" I hope they don't try to get in," said Dory. " That'd mean calling for reinforcements. We've handled them ourselves so far. I'd like to keep it that way."

" They don't know what they want," said Benjamin. " It wouldn't take very much to move them in either direction."

" Thank God it's raining. That'll wash the whisky out of them. What the hell are you laughing at? "

Superintendent Benjamin did not often laugh. Now his long face was wrinkled into folds of genuine merriment.

" I was thinking," he said, " that the Borners have—what's the legal word?—surrendered to their bail."

" They've surrendered to their bail, all right," said Dory. He thought of them as he had left them ten minutes before: Curly, still unconscious, being worked on by the police doctor; the other four, white-faced, jumpy even when the cell doors had shut on them.

" Do you think we ought to tell Whitcomb? "

Dory said something uncomplimentary about the Stipendiary Magistrate and went over again to look at the crowd.

" Count your blessings," said Benjamin. " If we can get through without any more broken heads, we'll come out the right side of the ledger. Think of the evidence those boys are going to give after tonight."

Dory said, " I fancy they're moving."

" Moving? " said Benjamin. " They're running away."

There was a disturbance at the mouth of the street. More than a disturbance, a turmoil.

The crowd, which had already started to thin out, was thrown back on itself, as a stream is thrown when it meets a more powerful current. Men moved back on either side, leaving a clear lane in the middle. And down the lane was advancing—

" Good God," said Benjamin. He leaned forward and jerked the window open.

It was hardly Petrella's fault that his long, black hair should have been flattened by the rain over his skull, or that his face, under the neon light, should have taken on a peculiar, bluish-white tinge.

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Benjamin took a grip of himself. He reminded himself of the unlikelihood—indeed, the impropriety—of the ghost of a Detective Inspector revisiting his old station; and he jumped for the stairs, ran down, and pushed through the crowd.

"Open the door," he said to the Station Sergeant.

"What about them outside?"

"I don't think we shall have much trouble with them now. Help me with these bolts."

Petrella advanced diffidently into a hushed room. "Good evening, sir," he said. "Good evening, Sergeant. What's up?" He gazed in blank astonishment at the dozen and more uniformed men sitting round on benches. "Why the reception committee?"

"You'd better come upstairs," said Benjamin. And to the Sergeant, "You can send 'em all home, except normal duty men."

Upstairs Petrella found Chief Superintendent Dory lighting a cigarette. He observed that he had a split ear and a black eye.

"Now that you are back," said Dory grimly, "perhaps you'll be good enough to explain what you've been up to."

But Petrella, for once, was unperturbed. He was triple-armed in his own unassailable rectitude.

"I don't know what's been going on around here," he said. "But it can't be anything to do with *me*. I've been on holiday."

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to TRAFFIC JAM

on page 41

1. *He wants to borrow a spanner and buy some petrol, in French, Italian, Spanish, and German respectively.*
2. *Henry Ford.*
3. *a. Lord Peter Wimsey; b. Gervase Fen; c. The Saint.*
4. *Green.*
5. *a. Agatha Christie; b. Christopher Morley; c. David Walker.*
6. *a. Sweet Molly Malone; b. Fanny Price; c. Jane Eyre.*
7. *Act dumb; don't do or say anything till an interpreter is found, motoring organisations advise.*

SOLUTIONS to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Impute.* 4, *Boss shot.* 10, *Candida.* 11, *Steamer.* 12, *Pace-maker.* 13, *Pony.* 15, *In ashes.* 17, *Cricket.* 19, *Gehenna.* 21, *Sea-wall.* 23, *Axle.* 24, *Last words.* 27, *Hidalgo.* 28, *Antonio.* 29, *Skylines.* 30, *Orally.*

Down. 1, *Incepting.* 2, *Panacea.* 3, *Triumphing.* 5, *Obstructs.* 6, *Shem.* 7, *Hammock.* 8, *Tarry.* 9, 20, *Bank holiday.* 14, *Tidal water.* 16, *Small bore.* 18, *Tall story.* 22, *Adrenal.* 23, *Ashes.* 25, *Seal.* 26, *All I.*

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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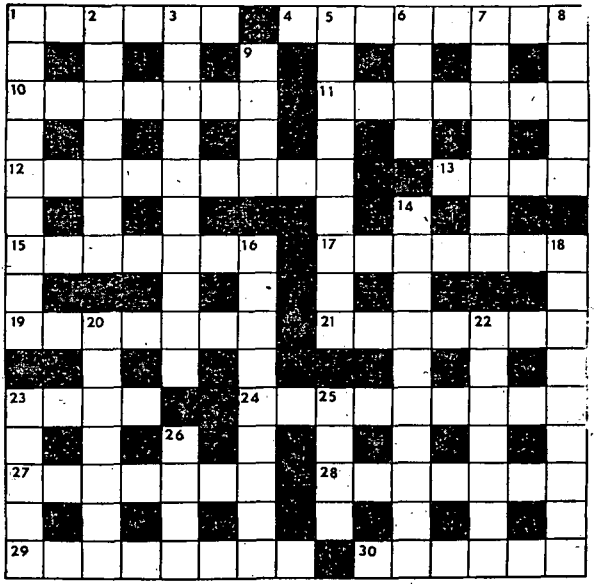
Solution on Page 143



★

CLUES

Across

1 Time up to ascribe (6).

4 Poor aim, but hit the chief (4, 4).

10 Ingenuous Shavian heroine (7).

11 Vaporous vessel (7).

12 Fast worker's pacific with a vowel (4-5).

13 Manually limited to fourteen (4).

15 "And some will mourn ——— ———, some coal-black" (Richard II) (2, 5).

17 Game to make you chirpy? (7).

19 Where bad barbers go when they dye! (7).

21 This mole keeps out 14 down (3-4).

23 A kiss in the beer goes round (4).

24 Many are famous (4, 5).

27 Spanish gent hid by ruined gaol (7).

28 Oh, oh, he's gone away (7).

29 Horizontal jet trails? (8).

30 Summons by word of mouth (6).

Down

1 Begin taking M.A. (9).

2 Remedy for A.E.C. a nap? (7).

3 Winning, but may not be pleasant (10).

5 Acts the filibuster (9).

6 Turn network for archetype! (4).

7 Bed's a hanging matter (7).

8 Seamanly delay (5).

9, 20 Day whereon a wild thyme's had? (4, 7).

14 Not Mediterranean, then (5, 5).

16 Tiny bit tedious, but does for 4 (5, 4).

18 In Argosy, perhaps? (4, 5).

22 Start advertising for a hormone (7).

23 Trophy of 17 (5).

25 Marine beast in a wax (4).

26 "——— ——— want is a room somewhere" (My Fair Lady) (3, 1).

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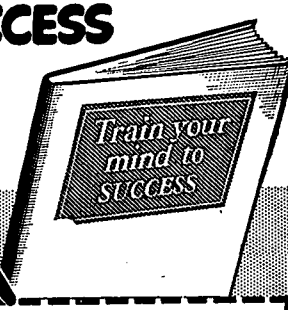

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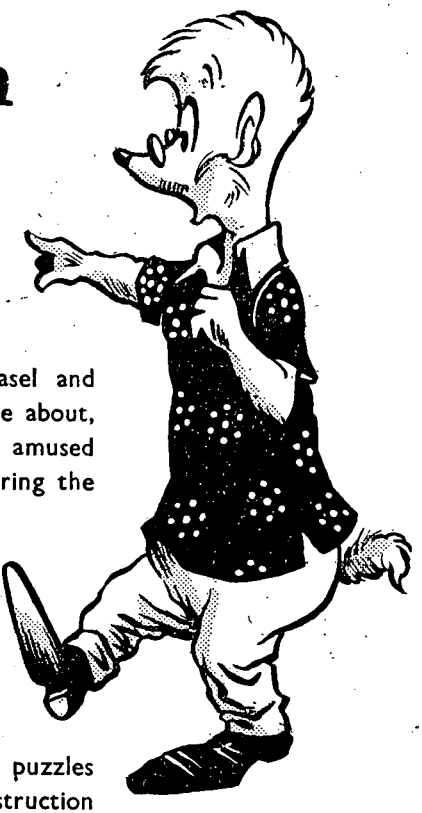

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